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FANTASTIC

AUGUST, 1970 Vol. 19, No. 6

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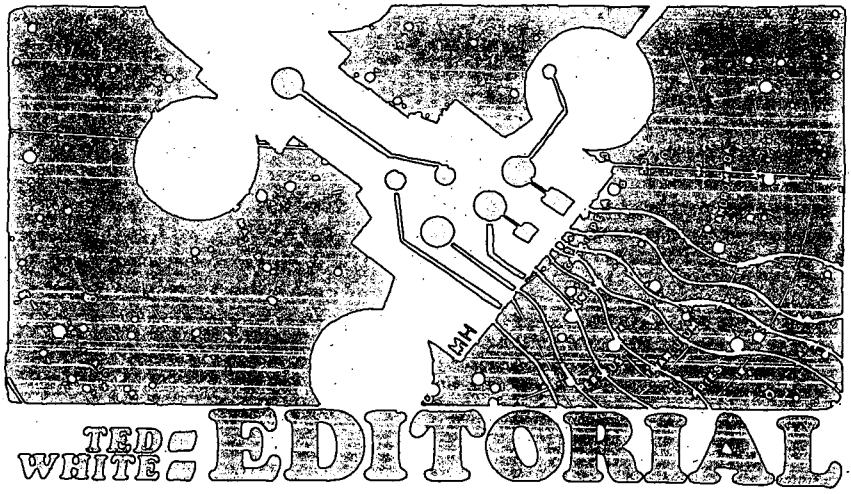

The papers and the newsmagazines have been full of the Sharon Tate murders for many months now. The sheer senselessness of these murders obviously exercises a morbid grip on the imaginations of many of us . . . and I confess that I must be included among those who feel that dread fascination. The original murders were bad enough, of course: the murder of an entire house full of people by a person or persons full of the frenzy of killing—repeated stabbings, bodies left hanging, etc. This was no "professional" killing like that of the Yablonskis. The murderers had obviously run amok. To add to one's sense of tragedy, Miss Tate was a lovely young movie star, and pregnant. At once: the murder of a larger-than-life symbol, equivalent in an odd way to the apparent suicide of Marilyn Monroe—and the very *personal* twist of anguish one must always feel at the wanton murder of an expectant mother. If one has any faith in life itself, that must indeed be sacrilege.

These are potent elements indeed, and when knotted together as they were, they must touch all of us in some vital area of our emotions, no matter how inured we are to "violence" in our culture.

The revelation of the apparent identity of the murderers, then, added a new layer of horror. The murderers were young girls, allegedly under the influence of drugs and a supposed "hippie" guru. They murdered the house full of people—one of them says—simply because those people happened to be in that house. The identity of the actual victims was, from their point of view, immaterial.

This is the stuff of sensationalism, of course: each new revelation strips back another layer of our nerve tissue. The incongruity of these young (teens and early twenties) girls as murderers. The allusions to drugs—particularly LSD—and to their "hippie" life-styles. The unveiling of their willing sexual

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bondage to a long-haired con-man in his thirties. For many people who have never understood long hair, the drug subculture, or the so-called new morality, this was the final underscore for all their fears and prejudices. And, sad to say, despite the fact that Charles Manson was never considered to be part of the original "Hashbury" hippie mileau, he is now on his way to becoming a "hero" among some young hippie types, purely because he symbolizes everything their antagonists fear.

What has any of this to do with *us*? you may ask.

The queerest turn of all was the revelation of Charles Manson's ties to the sf world.

The early reports mentioned that he had formed his own personal "religion" and that it was in part based on Scientology. Scientology is the offspring of Dianetics, L. Ron Hubbard's "Science of Life," which he unveiled to the world in the pages of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION* twenty years ago. In its early days Dianetics attracted a large number of sf people, including major names like A. E. van Vogt, although most of them dropped off along the way. I have had friends who have gone the route with Scientology, and although I refuse to swallow it whole hog, I have also had to temper my scepticism to an extent because there *are* areas in which I think Scientology does work. (Perhaps no better than other "therapies," but well enough, certainly.)

Scientology has had its ups and downs—the first book, *Dianetics, the Science of Life,* was a best-seller, and since then the cult has observed waves of popularity followed by waves of official repression—but it would appear that for the last few years it has been on an upswing. The New York subways burst out with advertising posters extolling the dramatic virtues of Scientology several years ago, and each month since (or however often it is necessary to put up new posters) fresh posters have appeared. That takes money and bespeaks a determined advertising campaign. Concurrent with this new upsurge has been the adoption of Scientology by segments of the "hippie" community—it has become, like astrology, a new and popular fad.

Therefore it isn't surprising Manson had occasion to pick up a little on Scientology. But the follow-up revelation was that he had based much of his philosophy and bizarre behavior on an sf book: Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land.*

This strikes closer to home.

The documentation seems real enough: Manson named one of the babies born to his commune Michael Vallentine Smith, he apparently set himself up as the leader of a religion at least superficially based upon the temple-prostitution of Heinlein's "Martian" religion, and he preached that it was no crime to kill people because simple "discorperation" was a favor for people, and they passed on to a better area of life, or somesuch. Like Heinlein's hero, he slept with his harem of girls indescriminately, treating them apparently like well-bred cattle, and using them to reward other men who did him favors.

Again, this is hardly peculiar to Manson and his "tribe".

Stranger in a Strange Land, with its curious blend of *Saturday Evening Post* salaciousness and half-baked mysticism, has been the object of more than one worshipful cult. Soon after the book's publication, in 1961, several west coast fan groups found themselves temporarily transformed into "nests," in which at

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 129)

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THE GOOD TRIP

URSULA K. LEGUIN

Illustrated by STEVE HARPER

Ursula K. Le Guin made her debut in the September, 1962 issue of this magazine with a haunting little time-travel fantasy called "April in Paris." Since that time she has published four increasingly important sf novels—the most recent, The Left Hand of Darkness, *in strong contention for the field's major awards—and an unclassifiably supurb juvenile fantasy,* A Wizard of Earthsea. *She has also gone on to appear in such magazines as* Playboy. *Thus it is with special pleasure that we welcome her return to these pages with a typically atypical Le Guin venture into 'inner space'—*

AS HE STARTED to swallow the stuff he knew he shouldn't, knew it for sure, knew it as a driver knows the truck coming straight at him at 70 mph: suddenly, intimately, finally. His throat shut, his solar plexus knotted up like a sea-anemone, but too late. Down the hatch, the bit of bitter candy, the acid-drop, the sourball, the peppy packet of power, to etch a little corroded trail of terror behind it all the way down his esophagus like a poisoned snail swallowed whole. It was the terror that was wrong. He was afraid and hadn't known it, and now it was too late. You can't afford to be afraid. Fear fouls it all up, and sends those few, those unhappy few, a very small percentage, to the loonybin to cower in corners not saying anything . . .

You have nothing to fear but fear itself.

Yes sir. Yes sir Mr. Roosevelt sir.

The thing to do is relax. Think good thoughts. If rape inevitable—

He watched Rich Harringer open up his little packet (accurately compounded and hygienically wrapped by a couple of fellows putting themselves through grad school in Chemistry by the approved American method of free enterprise, illegitimate to be sure but this is not unusual in America where so little is legal that even a baby can be illegitimate) and swallow the small sour snail with formal and deliberate enjoyment. If rape inevitable, relax and enjoy. Once a week.

But is anything inevitable besides death? Why relax, why enjoy? He would fight. He would not go on a bad trip. He would fight the drug consciously and purposefully, not in panic but with intent, and we'll see who wins. In this corner LSD/alpha, 500 micrograms, plain wrapper, the Tibetan Whirlwind; and in

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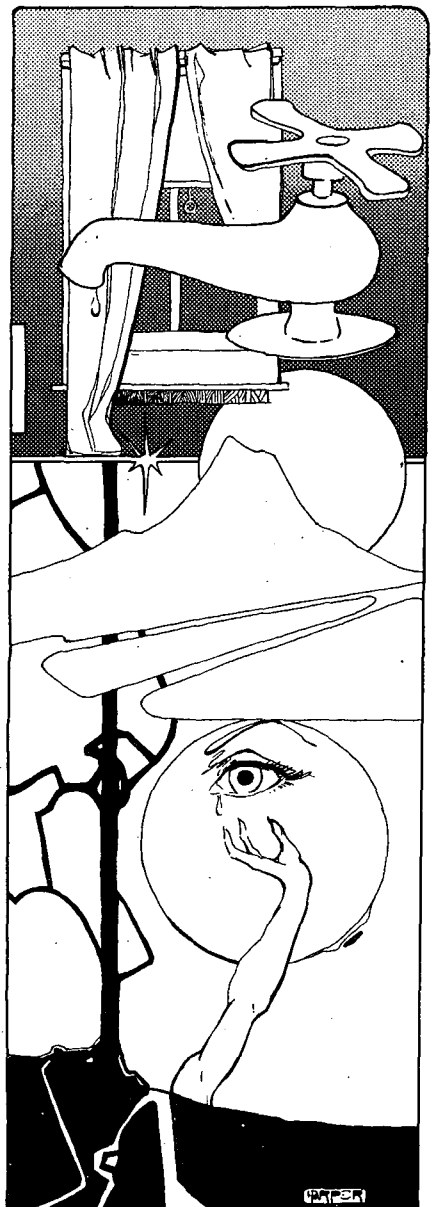
this corner, ladies and junglemen, L.S.D./B.A., M.A., 166 lbs., the Sonoma Sniveller, wearing white trunks, and red suitcases, and blue cheekpouches. Let me out of here, let me out of here! *Clang.*

Nothing happened.

Lewis Sidney David, the man with no last name, the Jewish Kelt, cornered in this corner, stared warily around him. His three companions all looked normal, in focus if out of touch. They did not have auras. Jim was lying on the verminous sofa-bed reading *Ramparts,* a trip to Viet Nam he wanted maybe, or to Sacramento. Rich looked torpid, he always looked torpid even when serving free lunch in the park, and Alex was nitpicking around on his guitar. The infinite satisfaction of the chord. The silver cord. Sursum corda. If he carries a guitar around why can't he play a tune on it? No: irritability is a symptom of loss of self-control: suppress it. Suppress everything. Censor, censor. Fight, team, fight!

Lewis got up, observing with pleasure the ready ease of his responses and the perfection of his sense of balance, and filled a glass of water at the vile sink. Beard hairs, spat-out Colgate, rust and radish droppings, a sink of iniquity. A small sink, but mine own. Why did he live in this dump? Why had he asked Jim and Rich and Alex to come share their sugarlumps with him here? It was lousy enough without being an opium den too. Soon it would be littered with inert bodies, eyes dropping out like marbles and rolling under the bed to join the dust and ruin lurking there. Lewis carried the glass of water over to the window, drank half of it, and began to pour the rest gently around the roots of a seedling olive-tree in a mended ten-cent pot. "Have a drink on me," he said, looking closely at the tree.



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It was five inches high but looked very like an olive tree, gnarled and durable. A bonsai. Banzai! But where's satori? Where's the significance, the enhancement, all the shapes and colors and meanings, the intensification of the perception of reality? How long does it take the damned stuff to work? There sat his olive tree. No less, no more. Unenhanced, insignificant. Men cry Peace, peace, but there is no peace. Not enough olive trees to go around, due to population explosion of human species. Was that a Perception? No, any undrugged meat-head could have perceived it. O come on, poison; poison me. Come, hallucination, come, so that I may fight you, reject you, refuse you, lose the fight and go mad, silently.

Like Isobel.

That was why he lived in this dump, and that was why he had asked Jim and Rich and Alex here, and that was why he was off on a trip with them, a pleasure-cruise, a holiday in picturesque Old Erewhon. He was trying to catch up with his wife. What is most difficult about watching your wife go insane is that you can't go with her. Farther and farther away she walks, not looking back, a long trip down into silence. The lyre falls dumb, and the psychiatrists are liars too. You stand behind the glass wall of your sanity like one at an airport watching a crash. You shout, "Isobel!" She never heard. The plane crashed in silence. She could not hear him call her name. Nor could she speak to him. Now the walls that divided him from her were brick, very solid, and he could do what he liked with his own glass house of sanity. Throw stones. Throw alphas. Tinkle, crash.

LSD/alpha did not drive you insane, of course. It did not even unravel your chromosomes. It simply opened the door to the higher reality. So did schizophrenia, he gathered, but the trouble there was that you couldn't speak, you couldn't communicate, you couldn't say what.

Jim had lowered his *Ramparts*. He was sitting in a noticeable fashion, inhaling. He was going to get with reality the right way, like a lama, man. He was a true believer and his life now centered upon the LSD/a experience as a religious mystic's upon his mystical discipline. Could you keep it up once a week for years, though? At thirty? At forty-two? At sixty-three? There is a terrible monotony and adversity to life; you'd need a monastery. Matins, nones, vespers, silence, walls around, big solid brick walls. To keep the lower reality out.

Come on, hallucinogen, get with it. Hallucinogenate, hallucinogenize. Smash the glass wall. Take me on a trip where my wife went. Missing person, age 22, ht 5'3", wt 105 lbs, hair brown, race human, sex female. She never was a fast walker. I could catch up with her with one foot tied behind me. Take me where she walked to . . . No.

I'll walk there by myself, said Lewis Sidney David. He finished pouring the water in little dribbles around the roots of the olive tree, and looked up, out the window. There through smeary glass was Mount Hood, forty miles away, two miles high, a volcanic cone possessing the serene symmetry peculiar to volcanic cones, dormant but not officially extinct, full of sleepy fires and surrounded by its own atmosphere and climate different from that of lower altitudes: snow and a clear light. That was why he lived in this dump. Because when you looked out the window of it, you saw the higher reality. Eleven thousand feet higher.

"I'll be damned," Lewis said aloud,

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feeling that he was on the edge and verge of perceiving something really important. But he had that feeling fairly often, without chemical assistance. Meanwhile there was the mountain.

A lot of muck, freeways and disposable office-buildings and highrises and urban renewal bombsites and neon elephants washing neon cars with dotted showers of neon, lay in between him and the mountain, and the base of it was hidden along with its foothills in a pale smog, so that the peak floated.

Lewis felt a strong impulse to cry and to say his wife's name aloud. He repressed this impulse, as he had been doing for three months, ever since May when he had taken her to the sanitarium, after the silent months. In January, before the silence began, she had cried a great deal, all day long some days, and he had become frightened of tears. First tears, then silence. No good. O God get me out of this! Lewis let go, quit fighting the impalpable enemy, and begged for release. He implored the drug in his bloodstream to work, to do something, to let him cry, or see colors, or go off his rocker, anything.

Nothing happened.

He finished pouring the water in little dribbles around the roots of the olive tree, and looked up, at the room. It was a dump, but big, and it had a good view of Mount Hood, and the wisdom-tooth crest of Mount Adams on clear days too. But nothing would happen here. This was the waiting room. He picked up his coat off a broken chair and went out.

It was a good coat, lambswool lining and a hood and all that; his sister and mother had clubbed to get it for him for Christmas, making him feel like R. R. Raskolnikov. But he was not going to murder any old pawnbrokers today. Not even a pseudocide. On the stairs he passed the painters and plasterers with their ladders and buckets, three of them, going up to do his room over, peaceful-looking, fresh-faced men in their forties and fifties. Poor bastards what would they do with the sink? With the three alphies, Rich and Jim and Alex, who on honeydew had fed and drunk the milk of Paradise? With his notes on LeNotre, Olmsted and McLaren, with his fourteen pounds of photographs of Japanese domestic architecture, with his drawingboard and fishing tackle, his Collected Works of Theodore Sturgeon bound in sensational cardboard, the 8 x 10' unfinished oil of an ataxic nude by a painter friend whose auto loan co. had attached his paintings, Alex's guitar, the olive tree, the dust and eyeballs under the bed? That was their problem. He went on down the rooming-house stairs that smelled of old tomcat, and heard his hiking boots clomping heartily. He felt that all this had happened once before.

It took him a long time to get out of the city. Since public transportation was forbidden to people in his condition, of course, he couldn't get on the Gresham bus which would have saved a lot of time, taking him through the suburbs and halfway there. But there was plenty of time. The summer evening would stay light; he could count on it. Lenient and sweet in their length are the twilights of a latitude halfway between equator and pole: no tropic monotonies, no arctic absolutes, but a winter of long shadows and a summer of long dusks: graduations and accommodations of brightness, attenuations of clarity, subtleties and leisures of the light. Children scuttered in the green parks of Portland and down long sidestreets, all at one great game over all the city, the game of Young. Only

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here and there a kid went alone, playing Solitude, for higher stakes. Some kids are gamblers born. Bits of trash scraped along the gutters moved by a warm wind now and then. There was a great, sad sound far off over the city as if lions were roaring in cages, walking and lashing their gold sides with gold-tasselled tails and roaring, roaring. Sun set, somewhere west over roofs, but not for the mountain that still burned with a white fire away up high. As Lewis left the last of the city and went through a pleasant land, hilly and well farmed, the wind began to smell of wet earth, cool, complex, as it will as night comes on; and past Sandy there was darkness under great increasing forests on the rising slopes. But there was plenty of time. Above and ahead the peak stood white, faintly tinged with apricot, in sunlight. As he climbed the long, steep road he came out again and then again from the dark forests into gulfs of yellow clarity. He went on until he was up above the forests and up above the darkness, on heights where there was only snow and stone and air and the vast, clear, enduring light.

But he was alone.

That wasn't right. He hadn't been alone when this had happened. He had to meet with. He had been with. Where?

No skis no sled no snowshoes not even an inner tube. If I had got the commission for this landscape, God, would have put a path along here. Sacrificing grandeur to convenience? But only a little path. No harm. Only a little crack in the Liberty Bell. Only a little leak in the dike, fuse on the bomb, maggot in the brain. O my mad girl, my silent love, my wife whom I sold into bedlam because you would not hear me speak, Isobel, come save me from yourself! I've climbed after you up above all the paths and now I stand here alone: there isn't any way to go.

Daylight died away and the white of the snow went somber. In the east, above endless darkening ranges and forests and pale, hill-enfolded lakes, Saturn shone, bright and saturnine.

Lewis did not know where the lodge was; somewhere on the timberline, but he was above timberline. He would not go down. To the heights, to the heights. Excelsior! A youth who bore mid snow and ice a banner with this strange device HELP HELP I AM A PRISONER OF THE HIGHER REALITY. He climbed. He climbed unclomben slopes, unkempt, and as he climbed he wept. His tears crawled down over his face and he crawled up over the mountain's face.

The very high places are terrible, alone at dusk.

The light no longer stayed for him. There was no longer plenty of time. He had run out of time. Stars came out and looked at him eye to eye out of the gulfs of darkness whenever he glanced aside from the huge white uptilted plain, the higher plane he climbed. On either side of him there was a gap, with a few stars in it. But the snow kept its own cold light, and he kept climbing. He remembered the path when he came across it. God or the State or he himself had put a path there on the mountain after all. He turned right, and it was wrong. He turned left, and stood still. He did not know which way to go, and shaking with cold and fear he cried out aloud to the death-white summit above him and to the black places in between the stars his wife's name, "Isobel!"

She came along the path out of the darkness. "I began to get worried about you, Lewis."

"I went farther than I meant to," Lewis said.

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"It stays light so long up here you sort of think it'll go on forever . . ."

"Right. I'm sorry I worried you."

"Oh, I wasn't worried. You know. Lonesome. I thought maybe your leg had slowed you down. Is it a good hike?"

"Spectacular."

"Take me along tomorrow."

"Didn't you enjoy skiing?"

She shook her head. "Not without you," she muttered, shamefaced. They went leftward down the path, not very fast. Lewis was still slightly hobbled by the pulled muscle that had kept him off skis the last two days, and it was dark, and there wasn't any hurry. They held hands. Snow, starlight, stillness. Fire underfoot, darkness around; ahead of them, firelight, beer, bed. All things in their due time. Some, born gamblers, will always choose to live on the side of a volcano.

"When I was in the sanitarium," Isobel said, pausing so that he too stopped and there was no longer even the noise of their boots on the dry snow, no sound at all but the soft sound of her voice, "I had a dream like this. Awfully like this. It was the . . . most important dream I had. Yet I can't recall it clearly—I never could, even in therapy. But it was like this. This silence. Being up high. The silence above all . . . above all. It was so silent that if I said something, you would be able to hear it. I knew that. I was sure of it. And in the dream I think I said your name, and you *could* hear me—you answered me—"

"Say my name," he whispered.

She turned and looked at him. There was no sound on the mountain or among the stars. She said his name.

He answered saying hers, and then took hold of her; both of them were shaking.

"It's cold, it's cold, we've got to go down."

They went on, on their tightrope between the outer and the inner fires.

"Look at that enormous star."

"Planet. Saturn—Father Time."

"Ate his children, didn't he," she murmured, holding hard to his arm.

"All but one of them," Lewis answered. Down a long clear slope before them now they saw in grey starlight the bulk of the upper hut, the towers of the ski-lift vague and gaunt, and the vast downsweep of the lines.

His hands were cold and he slipped off his gloves a minute to beat them together, but this was hard to do because of the glass of water he was holding. He finished pouring the water in little dribbles around the roots of the olive tree and set down the glass beside the mended flowerpot. But something still remained in his hand, folded into the palm like a crib for a highschool French final, que je fusse, que tu fusses, qu'il fut, small and sweat-stuck. He opened his hand and studied the item for some while. A message. From whom, to whom? From grave, to womb. A little packet, sealed, containing 500 mg of LSD/a in sugar.

Sealed?

He remembered, with precision and in order, opening it, swallowing the stuff, the taste of it. He also remembered with equal order and precision where he had been since then and knew that he had not been there yet.

He went over to Jim who was just exhaling the breath he had been inhaling as Lewis began to water the olive tree. Deftly and gently Lewis tucked the packet into Jim's coat-pocket.

"Aren't you coming along?" Jim asked, smiling a mild smile.

Lewis shook his head. "Chicken," he murmured. It was hard to explain that he had already come back from the trip he

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 145)

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Little did Richard Lupoff know, when we published "Man Swings SF" in our October, 1969 issue, that he had unleashed a monster in the form of the redoubtable Miss Ova Hamlet. The story brought in a flood of "nut mail," only a small percentage of which have we dared to print! The inevitable result was the much-sought return of Ova Hamlet with a new story! Indeed, after Miss Hamlet turned over the following story to Mr. Lupoff, he entered into a collaboration with her, the result of which is that the short story metamorphosed into the first chapter of Sacred Locomotive Flies, *a novel which will be published by Berkley Books over the by-line of Richard A. Lupoff ...*

MUSIC IN THE AIR

BY OVA HAMLET
As told to Richard A. Lupoff
Illustrated by MICHAEL HINGE

I. ADDONIZIO MINDS STORE AS USUAL

Despite rising demands for his ouster, indicted Newark Mayor Hugh Addonizio conducted business-as-usual yesterday at City Hall and, as he prepared for his Federal Court arraignment today on extortion and income tax charges, vowed continued administration of New Jersey's largest city "in its usual effective manner."*

CORNELIUS JERRY, middle-aged pseudo-adolescent man-boy, gun-toting drug-fiend music-lover. Curly red-haired mod-dressed symbol of tomorrow's today, Cornelius Jerry, hero of a hundred adventures on a dozen continents. Cornelius Jerry . . .

2. . . . snuggled the warm, flesh-soft plastic pseudo-leather briefcase on his lap, sliding its surface electrically over the thin imitation silk of his red-and-white striped bell bottoms as he waited impatiently for the thousand-passenger Boeing 3707 to be towed into position on the Pacific shuttle launch ramp. He glanced out the hundred-millimeter-thick quartzite viewport beside his first-class lounger, taking a farewell look at the BART landfill launchport that stood in the middle of what had once been San Francisco Bay.

3. Out the viewport and to the rear of the shuttle Cornelius could see thousands of acres of drive-ins, tract housing, Co-op Monopoly Stores and the gigantic sprawling university campus fading away into the morning fog toward Knowland City and the mountains beyond. Ahead the launch ramp gleamed as it rose slowly toward the towering pylons of the Golden Gate Dam that sealed off the polluted

*All quotes from the New York Daily News 12/19/69

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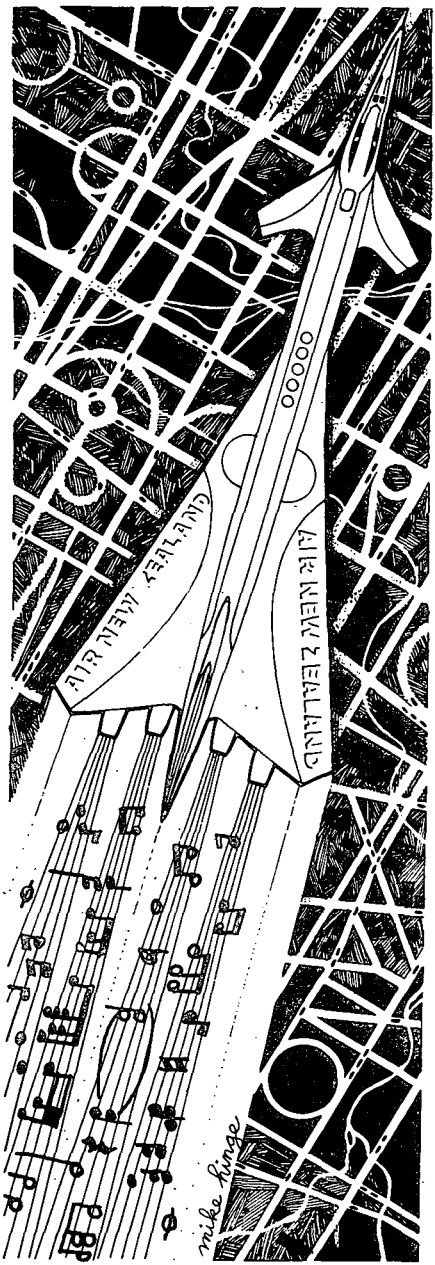
waters of the Pacific beyond the BART landfill project and connected the hills of Greater Hashbury with South Mendocino and its giant sequoia preserves.

4. Cornelius smiled uneasily as a naked trip hostess with "Plaf" tattooed over her left breast and "Pat" tattooed over the right one jiggled past, reaching down passenger rows to give comforting hugs to nervous first-timers. Cornelius tried hard to look bored. The last thing he wanted was a feel from a hostess right now. He heaved a sigh of relief as the trip hostess moved past. Cornelius turned to watch her, taking in her crystal-heeled slippers with the embedded light-show generators and the words "Pat" (tattooed on her left buttock) and "Plaf" (on the right).

5. With Pat Plaf safely past and the Boeing nearing launch position as the manned ground tractors clanked ahead, Cornelius opened his briefcase. For a moment he stared at its contents, his eyes misting briefly and a drop of spittle appearing at one corner of his mouth. Then he took hold of himself and set to the quick business of assembling the all-plastic submachine gun inside. In a matter of seconds, before the startled passengers around him could react, Cornelius had the gun together. He pulled open the front of his orange and purple shirt and lifted his chain necklace of Super-8 calibre dum-dum shells from around his neck, slapped it with professional aplomb into the submachine gun.

6. He thumbed his lounger into vertical position and stood on its arms shouting "Hold the shuttle! Everybody off except you five and Pat Plaf!" He gestured with his gun barrel toward five scruffy individuals occupying a love couch near the front of the first-class compartment. "Everybody off! This flight is going up with just us and the



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hostess and the captain! Everybody else off!"

II. ADAMO CALLS DEALING WITH RATTENNI CLEAN

Yonkers Councilman and Vice Mayor Frank A. Adamo admitted on the witness stand yesterday that he is acquainted with reputed Mafia chieftan Nicholas Rattenni, the Westchester garbage czar, but Rattenni—asked whether he knew the councilman—pleaded the Fifth Amendment on grounds of possible incrimination.

FOR A MOMENT the gigantic cabin was filled with shocked murmurs before the passengers began a frantic rush for the doors, but before they could get beyond their seats there was a gentle hiss and the plane filled with a slightly pungent green mist. In a trice Cornelius had filters in his nostrils and a chartreuse, absinthe-flavored lozenge in his mouth. He sucked it for five seconds, then, as the trip hostesses, gigoloes, strolling jugglers and prize-fighters who dotted the compartment fell insensible among the 999 unconscious passengers, he shouted again. "Good try, captain, but not good enough to trick Cornelius Jerry! I've been around too much! I've been trained by the best! Now unless you want me to spray this cabin with dum-dums you'll pump the antidote to that shit through this craft and you'll order everyone to do as I say!"

2. There was a period of silence, then Cornelius shouted again "I'm serious, captain! Can you hear this?" He cocked the plastic gun loudly. "I'll give you to the count of five, then I start killing people a few at a time! How would you like to explain a cabin full of dead passengers to the FAA?"

3. The silence went on a little longer. Jerry began counting, loudly and deliberately:

4. "One!"

5. "Two!"

6. "Three!" He uncocked the plastic gun, then loudly cocked it again.

III. SPOFFORD: THERE'S MORE ROOM

The number of youngsters held in the Spofford Youth Center in the Bronx has been reduced dramatically since a News series aired complaints that the institution was overcrowded, understaffed and beset with brutality, homosexuality and dope smuggling.

A VOICE CAME THROUGH the plane's speakers. "All right," it said, "here's the antidote. We'll play your way."

2. "Go ahead!" Cornelius said.

3. Again there was a hiss. This time the gas that filled the section was a rose pink, sweet-smelling and tangibly moist. Within half a minute the 999 unconscious passengers were moaning and writhing on their loungers. Gigoloes, strolling jugglers, prize-fighters and trip hostesses were struggling to their feet. Pat Plaf, who had fallen across a portly alcoholic millionaire from East Orinda, had to disengage her left breast (it had "Plaf" tattooed on it) from a suction pocket in his yellow and green striped flying tuxedo. As she stood he took a small bite from her right buttock (it too had "Plaf" tattooed on it).

4. "Get 'em all off the shuttle!" Jerry ordered again. "I just want me and the Sacred Locomotive"—he gestured toward the five scruffies—"on this shuttle when we launch. Plus you and that hostess Pat

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Plaf!"

5. Over the speaker system came the other voice: "Ladies and gentlemen this is your captain welcoming you to Shuttle Flight 339." The speaker hissed and crackled. "Due to a technical difficulty we'll have to ask you all to deplane at this time and return on foot to the terminal building. I'm sure that the airline will provide satisfactory alternate booking for you all. In the meantime you'll be our guests for bruncheon at the terminal cafeteria, where today's menu is salisbury steak, vegetable stew and spumoni. Please remain calm and exit through the nearest doorway. Your hostesses will show you the way."

6. Cornelius gestured at Pat Plaf with his gun barrel. He pointed it at the five scruffies in the love couch and Pat Plaf jiggled over to them and sat down heavily in their midst. The color-generators in her heels were sending out showers of red, white and blue illusion sparks. Within half an hour the passenger compartment was completely empty except for Cornelius Jerry, Pat Plaf and the Sacred Locomotive.

IV. ADDICT FOUND HANGED AFTER LOSING A PLEA

A woman under treatment at the state's drug-addiction rehabilitation center in this western New York village was found hanged today. In Albany, a spokesman for the State Narcotic Addiction Control Commission said Barbara Lewis, 30, of Buffalo was reported to have committed suicide. She was examined Wednesday by a commission psychiatrist after demanding medical care and medication, the spokesman said. The spokesman reported that the psychiatrist, Dr. Oscar Lopez of a rehabilitation center in Buffalo, had decided the medication she demanded was not warranted.

JERRY SHOUTED at the captain. "Okay, what's your name?"

2. "Clem Carter" crackled over the intercom speaker.

3. "Listen then, captain Carter," growled Cornelius, "this 3707 goes on autopilot, right?"

4. "Our ultramodern Boeing 3707 shuttles are the most fully automated suborbital ballistic craft ever built," the speaker answered. "We're scheduled for launch in another three minutes, on a great circle suborbital trajectory for Lake Baikal designed for your convenience and safety."

5. "That's swell," Jerry said.

6. "However, the positronic computeraided guidance system is equipped with an optional manual override capability developed jointly by the Sperry Gyrocomp Corporation, Boeing, and Trans-Orbit Airways."

7. "Leave it!" ordered Cornelius. "Leave the shuttle on auto and get back here into the passenger section quick!"

8. There was a fumbling, bumping sound from the front cabin of the big Boeing, then the door opened and a wizened figure emerged. It was clad in an ancient leather aviation suit, zipper jacket, fleece-lined trousers and boots. The skin was stretched sallow and tight across facial bones, with the only life glittering faintly in sunken beady eyes. The face sported a huge walrus moustache gone entirely to gray, and the whole was surmounted by a leather flying helmet and goggles.

9. "Captain Clem Carter, Trans-Orbit Airlines, at your service, sir," the apparition croaked.

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10. "You expect to fly this thing?" Cornelius gasped.

11. Pat Plaf placed one hand on Cornelius's arm (the one not used to hold the submachine gun). Before Carter could answer she whispered softly in Cornelius's ear "Just humor him, please. All these flights are automatic. We just let him ride in the cabin and pretend he's the pilot. All the old pilots ride these flights. It makes them happy and it doesn't do any harm."

12. "Okay," Cornelius said, pulling Pat Plaf close so he could feel her warmth through his thin, colorful outfit. "But keep him out of trouble or he's a deader!"

13. "Oh, thank you, thank you," Pat Plaf murmured, her hot mouth touching Cornelius's ear wetly. "Come on, Captain Carter, let's get onto a lounger now. We can't take these launches standing up," she said.

14. With a loud blat and a surge of acceleration that buckled Cornelius's knees and sent him onto a lounger clutching his plastic submachine gun the huge Boeing 3707 slid westward along its glittering launch ramp, pressing its eight occupants down as it rose to the pylon tops of the old Golden Gate Bridge that had provided the skeleton for the present Golden Gate Dam, and lifted majestically through the Cal-Pacific pollution layer into the sunlight penetrating the upper layers of the Pacific atmosphere.

15. In a matter of minutes the acceleration was over and the Boeing 3707 was in its suborbital trajectory, black sky above, gray-brown filth below, razor-edged delta wings fading from takeoff red back to their usual green and white candy stripe pattern beyond the ovoidal quartzite viewports.

16. "Now, before we get down to business . . ." Cornelius opened his imitation leather briefcase once more and removed a small, heavy pressure cylinder. Juggling his plastic super-8 in one hand he got the cylinder cradled in the crook of his elbow, pulled a flexible hose loose from its place wrapped around the cylinder and held it so the others could see its plastic mouthpiece. Cornelius opened a valve on the cylinder and there was a faint but steady hiss.

V. CALLS CALLEY MY LAI SCAPEGOAT

Rep. Alvin E. O'Konski (Wis.), ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, blasted the Army today for making a "scapegoat" of 1st Lt. William L. Calley Jr. in the My Lai incident. He introduced a bill to provide Calley and any other defendants charged in the alleged massacre with government-paid civilian lawyers. O'Konski said the Army only decided to charge Calley and Staff Sgt. David Mitchell 18 months after the March 16, 1968, My Lai action "in order to keep peace groups from using the alleged atrocity to discredit the Vietnam war."

"WANT SOME?" He extended the cylinder in a semi-circular motion taking in Miss Plaf, Captain Carter and the five scruffies. A couple of the scruffies extended their hands and Cornelius tossed the cylinder to one of them, a skinny man with long, unruly hair and a beard that between them hid most of his face, wearing a stained black frock coat beneath which the bottoms of baggy khakis hung down. "Here, Jeth, have a little," Cornelius called.

2. "Wah, you know us?" the skinny man asked. While Cornelius answered he clenched the mouthpiece in his teeth and

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gave the valve a quick twist to the left, then to the right again. A look of pleasure spread across his face and he handed the cylinder to the scruffy beside him as cloudlets of striped and dotted smoke drifted slowly from his mouth. The next man, a brawny individual in a net shirt and long curls, flung his fingers in a mad random twitching, then took the cylinder and repeated Jeth's actions.

3. "Sure I know you," Cornelius Jerry said, ruffling his own carrotty curls with his free hand. "You guys of the Sacred Locomotive are what this thing is all about. I know you guys up and down, I've memorized all your spools. I really dig your flautistry, Jethro Anderson. And your thrushwork, Joe Schmecker!" He grinned almost worshippingly at the man in the net shirt.

4. "Eddie Carmody, drummer." He pointed his super-8 submachine at a baldheaded man whose hairless face immediately went into a dance of frowns, grins, startled and angry looking twitches as its muscles ticced.

5. "Fat Boy Fong, lead banjojo and vocal. I'd tell you not to fret but that would spoil your playing." Cornelius cackled merrily at his pun, then pointed his plastic weapon at the gross musician who joined feebly in the laughter.

6. "And Max Marx, bass," Cornelius completed his listing of the rock musicians. "Miss Plaf, did you know that the world's greatest rock group, the Sacred Locomotive, was on your plane? Did you know, Captain Carter?"

7. Carter said "The last great orchestra leader was the late Kenny Rankin. When that flaming modernist Kenton came along he destroyed all that was fine and noble in music. I stopped listening in 1946, but I have some old 78 RPM Brunswicks up in the cabin, and a genuine crank-wound Atwater-Kent with sapphire needles if you want to hear some *real* music."

8. Pat Plaf said "Oooh," and collapsed familiarly among the five members of the Sacred Locomotive. Her slippers were emitting purple and yellow checkerboard patterns of simulated sheet lightning punctuated with silent shots of Gene McCarthy reading his famous Second Inaugural Sonnet Cycle.

9. "Between here and splashdown at Lake Baikal there's enough time for a couple of good numbers," Cornelius said. "Why don't you guys spread out, set up your equipment, and get warmed up." Before the Sacred Locomotive could say anything Cornelius waved his super-8 around two or three times and said "No arguments, this is a command perf!" He giggled a little. "Pat Plaf and I will while away the time nearby!"

10. The Sacred Locomotive looked at one another, Anderson said "Well, I suppose we might as well have a little session as not." They began dragging instruments from under their seats, cracking pressure cartridges to blow up compressed drums, cymbals and banjojo. Cornelius retrieved his own pressure cylinder from Max Marx who was about to blow up his bass with it.

VI. SHOP WINDOWS CHRISTMAS WONDERLAND

Each Yuletide season, the internationally famous shop windows of Fifth Ave. are turned into a dazzling, mile-long treat of Christmas wonderland with sounds and sights to brighten the eyes of any youngster. Filled with sparkling, elaborate displays and pouring forth carillons and carols, the windows are the annual personal magic of Santa's most creative helpers and each deserves a

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special gift of appreciation.

CAPTAIN CARTER was sitting next to a viewport, holding his hands flat in front of his shoulders, elbows extended, swaying his torso and arms in simulated flight, making World War I engine noises through his clenched teeth and interrupting himself periodically to sound like a prop-synchronized .30-calibre or to hiss lines like "Come ahead, Richtofen, do your worst, the Phantom Bluejay is ready!" or "Come on, Sopwith baby, don't let your yankee boy down!"

2. Cornelius and Pat Plaf reclined on a double-sized lounger upholstered in lavender and vermilion cubes, passing the cylinder back and forth and giggling as they played grabbies. Every so often the light pattern in Pat Plaf's slippers would shift into a new rhythm of strobing flashes in some previously unseen color and Cornelius Jerry would stare fascinated, one arm holding the cylinder wrapped around Plaf's pleasant person, the other holding his plastic super-8 tight through it all.

3. In a little while the Sacred Locomotive began tuning up their instruments. Even in the huge cabin of the Boeing the microcircuit speakeramps built into the bodies of the bass and banjojo-produced a deafening volume of sound, bouncing Pat Plaf and Cornelius Jerry off their padded lounger and onto their asses. Fortunately for Plaf the 3707 was furnished with standard body-temperature lush-piled carpets for the comfort of passengers who liked to travel barefoot. The soft pile kept her from rubbing her tattoos off and the warmth kept her ass comfy.

4. Fat Boy Fong and Max Marx faced each other and simultaneously struck C natural chords. The bass and banjojo picked up each other's reverberations and fed them back. Instead of playing their strings any more Fat Boy and Max moved their instruments up and down in the feedback fields they had created, working their amplifier knobs and wow-switches to make drawn-out notes that swooped and wavered around them, filling the 3707 with a weird counterpoint melody that grew broader and broader as it bounded back and forth between them.

5. Carmody tapped tentatively on a reconstituted brass cymbal, ran steepled fingers lightly over the gookskin heads of twin contrabass drums, ticced a few times for good measure and worked into a steady beat punctuated with harsh metalwork. Anderson flipped toggles and adjusted verniers on a glittering silver flute, upped his own amp and joined with a startling organ-like tone.

6. Joe Schmecker adjusted his mike, amplifier and distorter (all built into caps on his front teeth and powered by thermocouples picking up temperature variants between inside and outside his mouth) and by the time the four musicians had finished noodling he flung his arms in a wild circle, gave a huge convulsive body spasm and was off into the old Peter Sinfield lyric:

Cat's foot Iron claw

Neuro-surgeons Scream for more . . .

7. Cornelius Jerry jerked his torso upright, Pat Plaf sitting naked between his legs, one of Cornelius's arms around her clutching one breast (with "Pat" tattooed over it), the other holding his plastic super-8 flat against her belly, its muzzle buried in the warm rug between her thighs. They swayed in rhythm to the music, watching Schmecker's jerks and

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Carmody's tics until the music reached a break and Anderson, taking off on a soaring solo, tucked one foot under his body and stood, incredibly balanced, for the rest of the number. When they'd finished *Twenty-First Century Schizoid Man* they took a break and retuned their instruments.

VII. FAREWELL TO WHEELUS

Bowing meekly to here's-your-hat urgings of radical military men who recently toppled King Idris I of Libya, the U.S.A. already is pulling out of Wheelus Air Force Base in the big North African country, though a treaty says we can stay through 1971.

CORNELIUS JERRY got to his feet and retrieved his pressure cylinder from the floor near the lounger he and Plaf had shared. Cornelius took a deep hit from the mouthpiece, followed by Plaf, Schmecker, Fong, Marx, Carmody and Anderson. When Cornelius offered the cylinder to Captain Carter, Carter waved him away.

2. "That stuff rots your brain, leads to stronger things, causes moral breakdown, crime, illiteracy, promiscuity and athalete's foot, sonny. I have my own stuff." Keeping one hand on the invisible joystick of his World War Camel he struck all the pockets of his leather suit with the other. Out came a flat bottle filled with light brown fluid. "Here's to Kaiser Bill!" He downed a hefty swig.

3. Cornelius turned back to the Locomotive. "You know *The Motor City's Burning*? Sure, it's on your second spool! How about it?"

4. Schmecker started *a capella*. Soon the others joined and took it straight to the break, then Fong and Marx jammed until the shuttle tilted over into its plunge toward the waters of Lake Baikal. Before they splashed down every one was in a lounger, the Sacred Locomotive was doing a credible imitation of fire engines and gun fire, Cornelius was hanging onto Pat Plaf and keeping his submachine gun at the ready behind her back, Captain Carter was clutching his chest with both hands, coughing and gasping.

5. "Is he having an attack of some sort?" Cornelius asked.

6. Plaf said "No, listen to him, he does that every time we splash in."

7. Cornelius listened. Between coughs and gasps Carter was moaning and saying "Another brave air pioneer goes to an unmarked hero's grave. Hoist one for me at the escadrille mess tonight, comrades, and turn my picture to the wall. Ask the old man to write one to Mother for me, and send the boys down to break the news at the Boite de Boise. Tell sweet Antoinette that her marricaine will kiss her no more. Kiss her no more for me, fellows. Down, down I plunge toward the barbed wire and the trenches, the doughboys and the poilus, the limeys and the huns, down, down, screaming, trailing flames and smoke, my empennage never more to rise into the crisp dawn over Vimy Ridge, my beloved's colors never again to stream from my cap as I roar into combat in the aerial lists where charge and fend the last true knights of warfare." Carter continued.

8. "Does he always do that?" Cornelius asked.

9. "Always," said Plaf. "Sometimes on launches but always on splashdown. Once in a while he forgets to stop and segues from his takeoff sequence right into the landing. The hostesses keep his microphones turned off so he won't bother passengers. That's why it took him so

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long to answer when you said you were taking over the flight. He couldn't find the switch to reenable his mike."

10. The Sacred Locomotive were off on another chorus of *The Motor City's Burning*. Outside the viewport the delta wings of the 3707 were heating up again, their red glowing surfaces starting to accumulate aerial trash from the Central Asia pollution zone, setting scraps of corrugated cardboard, newsprint, industrial dump matter and other miscellaneous flying crap on fire. As the Boeing approached the murky surface of Lake Baikal it was surrounded by a huge envelope of burning garbage.

11. With a jolt that drove Cornelius and the others down into their color-patterned loungers the big Boeing plunged into Lake Baikal, totally submerged for a few seconds, then bobbed back to the surface like a hollow buoy. Clouds of steam rose outside all the viewports. The Sacred Locomotive had finished their version of *The Motor City's Burning* on the way down and slouched quietly in their places. Pat Plaf's pedal light show had subsided into a steady pulsing of vermilion and orange.

12. As the steam drifted away in a light breeze outside the shuttle Cornelius could see the surface of Lake Baikal lapping at the fuselage and delta wings of the Boeing. The shuttle's skin had cooled now but the water immediately around had been so heated that the organic waste from industrial Irkutsk and surrounding neo-Mongoloid housing developments had come to a boil, and the bedraggled remnants of the region's once dense wildlife were variously flapping, gliding, trotting, slithering, rolling, bounding or swimming to partake of the rich instant stew.

VIII. HOW NOT TO ENTERTAIN A DATE

Too many girls nowadays are indifferent about attire but concerned about their makeup. Interest in one's appearance is important but it's tactless to concentrate on touching up the complexion, fixing the hair, adjusting eye lashes, etc., in the presence of a date. A quick dab of powder or a hurried touch with the lipstick is permissible but, for more extensive repairs, you need privacy.

CORNELIUS JERRY had whiled away the past few moments with his tongue curled around one of Pat Plaf's nipples (when he opened his eyes he found a baroque blue-and-crimson tattooed "P" pressing into his left orb and a similarly ornate "F" squashed against his right). Miss Plaf had her hands on the back of his head and neck, tousling his carroty curls with one and running the other up and down his top vertabrae.

2. Cornelius put his tongue back in his mouth and said "Do we get back on shore and ready for relaunch automatically? How about refueling?"

3. Plaf said "The machinery does it all. Computer control. If nobody stops us we'll be airborne again headed for Lake Tanganyika in fifteen minutes."

4. "Nobody better try and stop us! If they do, everybody gets machine-gunned and then I start shooting up the expensive instruments in the cabin. You know how expensive computers are?"

5. "I do, I do, so I know that the local Trans-Orbit reps won't stop us."

6. "Amazing!" Captain Carter said. "Miraculous! Somehow the Phantom Bluejay brought his craft home despite damage that would have sent any lesser pilot and his plane to the last big

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aerodrome in the sky. Some lucky star must have shone the day the Phantom Bluejay was born. Some hovering fairy must have touched the mite as he lay gurgling in his cradle, given him the blessing of wings although he never knew it till many years later. Someday when the journalists have had their day and history records the great achievements of this tragic conflict, there will be a paragraph—no, a full chapter at the least—reserved for the incredible exploits of the Phantom Bluejay and his valiant Spad." He went on.

7. Cornelius disengaged from Plaf, checked his super-8 to make sure it was still in fireable condition, then walked over to the Sacred Locomotive. "Hey, you guys were great! I've heard your concerts before but this was really too much! Tell you what, I've always had a dream concert of great classic numbers that I've wanted to hear you play. Now look, while we get racked up for the next launch let's have some chow and I'll tell you what I have in mind.

8. "Hey, Plaf!" He motioned the hostess over with his plastic gun. "Hit the galley and see what you can unfreeze for us."

9. Heels flashing an icy blue-green interspersed with gigantic blow-ups of classic R. Crumb porno art, Pat Plaf made her way to the galley. In a moment her voice drifted back: "Nothing but a thousand portions of frozen hyped roast egg."

10. "Okay, bring 'em on!"

11. There came the sound of quick frozen foods rotating through the Boeing's galley's autoheat range. Soon Plaf was back with eight trays precariously balanced on various parts of naked anatomy. She gave one to each member of the Sacred Locomotive, one to Captain Carter, and one to Cornelius Jerry. She put the eighth on her own lap as she lowered herself onto a lounger upholstered in Louis XVth rococo.

12. From the pilot's cabin the shuttle's loudspeaker system announced launch in three minutes.

13. "Who's that?" Cornelius asked.

14. "Part of the automatic system," Plaf said. "We used to let the pilots do that themselves but they tried to get too cute so we changed the computer program to do it for them."

IX. 'THE DAMNED' IS A SICK FILM

"The Damned," subtitled "Gotterdammerung (Twilight of the Gods)" is a sickening drama focussing on the moral disintegration of a wealthy German family on the eve of the rise of Nazi power. Under Luchino Visconti's heavy direction, ruthless emotions are bared, leading melodramatically to murder and double suicide.

"LOUSY DECADENT modernists," Carter spit. "Take away control of our planes, take away control of our cars, take away everything. Machines run everything nowadays. When I was a boy the world was run right. None of this damn automatic machinery telling you what to do, what not to do. And we knew what music was, too! None of this junk you hear today. Pardon me, Trans-Orbit certainly doesn't wish to insult its passengers"—he nodded toward the Locomotive—"but we had Paul Whiteman, Kate Smith, Ted Weems and Elmo Tanner. Kay Kyser and Sammy Kaye. The last real band leader was Lawrence Welk. After him, just noisy junk. Twang-twang, thump-thump, you call that music?"

2. He cackled triumphantly and began

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conducting an invisible orchestra while he hummed *Minnie the Moocher* off key very loudly.

3. Cornelius Jerry gulped down the last of his roast egg. "Singed," he commented, rose, walked to the door of the captain's cabin, looked back, waved his plastic submachine gun a few times, then stepped through the doorway and closed it behind him.

4. The intercom said "Liftoff in one minute."

5. Cornelius reappeared, snuggled down on a lounger with Plaf, and sniggered. He had his pressure cylinder in his hand again, took a long, deep draught, planted his mouth tight against Plaf's and exhaled until her eyes bugged and twin jets of vapor shot out her nostrils, yellow from the right and blue from the left. He leaned back and giggled. She looked angry for a few seconds, then joined him.

6. With a crash and roar the Boeing 3707 began to race forward on the Irkutsk launch ramp, picking up velocity and heat with each second. By the time the big craft had reached the end of the ramp it was glowing red again, filling the air with cinders of cooked aerial garbage and quick-roasted mallards. The Boeing leaped off the edge of the ramp, pointed its needle-nose upward in an even steeper climb and drove ever faster for the sky.

7. The automatic loudspeaker said "Please do not leave your lounger until the overhead sign goes off. This announcement is for your safety and convenience," in an April Stevens whisper.

8. Cornelius took another small toke off the cylinder and passed it once around the band. Plaf took a little, Captain Carter lighted a cracked and disreputable looking briar and waved the cylinder away. "That stuff'll destroy you," he said. "You think you can keep it under control but one day you find you can't do without it, then . . ."

9. He kept on but Cornelius walked away. He gestured with his gun, holding his breath, and the Sacred Locomotive started into *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. The Boeing climbed and climbed and they played and played. When they finished *You Can't Always Get What You Want* they used a few phrases of *Nothing Is Easy* as a transition into their own *Hymn to the Sacred Locomotive*. Fat Boy Fong and Max Marx handled the lead banjojo and bass over the steady groundwork of Carmody's drumming. Jethro Anderson and Joe Schmecker, Anderson standing on one foot and swaying in the gentle vibration of the Boeing while Schmecker twisted and writhed to the prods of unseen avenging angels, traded off the two-part vocal:

Glorious annihilator of time and space

Lord of distance, imperial courier

Hail, swift and sublime man-created god

Hail colossal and bright wheel

10. On and on they went until the instruments came to their roaring, crashing climax, the lyrics ending with:

Thy axles burn with the steady sweep

Till on wings of fire they fly!

11. *Crash* came the chord of Fong's banjojo, *crash* Marx's bass, and a huge *crash* from Carmody's 36-inch giant cymbal, and the hymn was over.

X. *JEWS DODGE ARAB SUMMIT*

Most of Morocco's 45,000 Jews faded discreetly from sight as delegations began to arrive for a three-day Arab summit conference opening Saturday to mobilize against Israel. As part of intense security precautions to guard the kings, presidents

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and ministers from 14 Arab states, Jews living on streets which visiting delegations will use have been told to keep windows shut and to stay off balconies.

CAPTAIN CARTER sat beside a viewport watching the glowing wings of the shuttle fade. Pat Plaf had Cornelius Jerry's cylinder on a lounger and was inhaling fumes of puce and chartreuse. Cornelius Jerry waved his gun in front of the Sacred Locomotive as they stood, holding their instruments at the ready, and the Boeing climbed and climbed into darkening sky.

2. The Sacred Locomotive went into a great old Sun Ra number, Anderson back on flute, Schmecker carrying the vocal alone, Cornelius Jerry standing before the group waving his submachine gun more and more violently with the growing fury of Carmody's tics, Schmecker's spasms, the tension of the song; Cornelius's thintite striped bells did not hide his arousal as the song built, rising in pitch to its screaming climax, Schmecker shouting *Leaving the solar system, leaving the solar system . . .*

3. Cornelius Jerry screaming with him, lowering his skin-color, flesh-warm super-8 all-plastic submachine gun to the hip, pointing it at the Sacred Locomotive, screaming *Leaving the solar system, now NOW,* squeezing the warm plastic form-fitted eageready trigger and crashing sideways under the impact of a hurtling mass that rose from concealment behind a nearby lounger, launched across the passenger cabin, collided with him, knocked him over. Jerry felt the gun wrenched from his hands, half-saw half-felt it flung across the cabin to clatter against a viewport and be captured by Captain Carter.

4. Cornelius was on his stomach, his arms jerked upward between his shoulder blades in a blinding agony that brought tears to his eyes and one despairing moan to his lips. "Who—?" he asked. "Wha—?"

5. He felt his arms released, a heavy weight lifted from his back. He rolled over and lay helpless before an apparition.

6. She couldn't have been more than 14 but precociously developed and equipped with excess fat that must have brought her weight over 150 pounds. Her hair was long, wavy, stuck up from all directions on her head. Her features were plain but marked with angry encrustations of acne. She wore a ragged t-shirt with huge sagging breasts and clearly visible nipples protruding through its thin, dirty cotton. Beneath the shirt a roll of fat and a hairy navel protruded above bleached and tattered blue jeans two sizes too small to contain her billowing hips and fat legs.

7. "I'm Mavis Montreal!" she cried triumphantly, "The Sacred Locomotive's own groupie! I was just waiting for a chance to get that silly thing from you and save my boys." She turned to the band. "How's it hanging, Fat Boy? You over the clap yet, Carmody? It's givin' me cavities and shingles all at once, hyuk, hyuk!" She picked her nose with one hand, slapped the drummer's bald head with the other and kicked Cornelius Jerry in the ribs.

8. He lay sobbing.

9. The Sacred Locomotive started to play another old tune, Al Kooper's *You Never Know Who Your Friends Are.*

10. Captain Carter was clutching Cornelius Jerry's gun and trying to persuade Pat Plaf to try some of the stuff he was drinking.

11. The Boeing kept climbing and climbing into the blackness.

—Ova Hamlet

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A GIFT FROM THE GOZNIKS

This is Gordon Eklund's second published story. You will recall his first, "Dear Aunt Annie," in the April issue of this magazine. It is already being spoken of quite seriously as an award-nominee by fans and pros alike. Readers have compared it with the pyrotechnic works of Philip K. Dick. This time around Gordon tells a very different sort of story, one evocative of Zenna Henderson: quiet, human, and immediately involving: And one is bound to wonder—what will he write next?

GORDON EKLUND

Illustrated by MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

I LOOKED AT the one candle that still burned on my birthday cake and decided that I'd done well enough getting the other eleven with my first try. I'd made a wish; I always did. But too many years have passed now for me to remember what it was. It couldn't have come true. For that, you have to snuff out all of the candles on your first try.

I was just getting ready for another try at that last candle when we heard the knock at the door. There were two hesitant pecking taps and then, after a short pause, a single solid rap.

"Now who could that be?" asked my mother, looking first at me, then at my father, and finally at my sister Evelyn. We all shook our heads, joined by the handful of neighbor children who had stopped by to share our ice cream and cake.

Mother started to pull herself out of her chair in order to answer the door. But, before she had a chance, the door opened silently and the girl walked inside.

She was a mess that first day, standing in the open doorway, looking just a bit shy, a little uncertain of herself. She wore a tattered old plaid dress, which was covered in a dozen places with worn patches. Her light brown hair was caked with mud and dust, her hands and face covered with soil and grime. Her feet were bare and as dirty as the rest of her. I thought she was fifteen—maybe sixteen at the most—and, underneath all the dirt, a rather nice-looking girl.

She stood in the open door for what seemed many long minutes, her face expressionless, looking all of us over carefully, one by one. I must have been the last in line. Her eyes stopped at me and rested. I looked down at the burning candle on my cake. When I looked back, she was smiling at me.

"Jack," my mother whispered. "Jack—who is she?"

I had no idea. I shook my head, still watching the girl as her smile grew larger.

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In a moment, I knew, I would be smiling along with her.

Mother turned her questioning glance toward Father. He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Who are you, girl?" Mother asked, at last. She moved toward the girl, a questioning smile on her face.

The girl took a step backward, then straightened, standing her ground. "I'm Shareen. I've been sent here to you. This is the right place, isn't it? The Allen Farm?"

All of us seemed to nod our heads in unison. Mother said, "Yes."

Shareen smiled and clapped her hands together in front of her face. "Oh, I'm so glad," she said, looking at all of us again, one by one. "I've looked for you for such a long time."

Father cleared his throat. I could see that he was disturbed. He hated any break from established routine.

"You said somebody sent you here," said Father. "Who is this somebody?"

"Oh, nobody you know, Mr. Allen. It was just this Goznik and he—" She stopped, as if realizing that she'd said more than she should. "Oh, it just doesn't matter. I'm here to help you."

"Help? We don't need—" Mother cut him off with a brisk wave of her hand. She closed the door behind the girl, took her by the hand, and led her into the room.

"It doesn't matter who sent you here. Or why. Anybody who looks the way you do can stay long enough to get clean."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Allen. I knew you'd say that. I just knew it."

Shareen stood for a moment, beaming her gratitude at Mother. Then she crossed the room, nodding politely to everyone she passed. She stopped in front of me, looking first at my cake, then back at me.

"You must be Jack. And this is

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your . . . your birthday cake. You're twelve today, right?" Without waiting for an answer, she stooped down, puckered her lips, and blew out the last candle.

"Now you'll get your wish," she said.

"No, you have to get all of them at once."

"Don't be so sure of that, Jack. You never can tell about wishes." She looked behind me. My sister, Evelyn, was back there, hiding.

"And you're Evelyn. I'm so happy to meet you. The three of us are going to have so much fun together. It's been such a long time since I've had anyone to play with. You don't know how lonely I've been these last few years."

The last sentence was said to all of us. It seemed to break whatever ice might have been left unbroken. Suddenly, everyone clustered around Shareen. Mother tried to pull her upstairs for a bath. Father thought she should eat lunch first. The neighbor children introduced themselves, inviting her to come over and see their farms as soon as she could. Even Evelyn, who usually took a week to say her first word to a stranger, was right in there, talking as fast as anyone.

I was left alone with my birthday cake. Reaching down with a finger, I plopped a fat chunk of vanilla icing into my mouth.

"Jack, would you show me upstairs to the guest room? Your mother says that's where I'll be sleeping." It was Shareen. She had deserted the crowd and joined me.

"Sure," I said. "Let's go." I removed the finger from my mouth, wiping the wetness on the leg of my pants.

We went upstairs, leaving the party below. Shareen followed me, speaking excitedly in a rapid, high-pitched voice. She talked of the fun we would have together, of how we would go riding in the North Acreage every chance we got. We would go fishing and swimming and just everywhere. How lucky it was that summer was just beginning. There would be work, too—she knew that. Farm life wasn't all sunshine and play. But even work could be fun, if a person went at it with the proper attitude.

I stopped in front of the guest room. I recalled something Shareen had said earlier and a question formed in the back of my mind.

"Shareen," I said, "what's a Goznik?"

For a second, I was sure that I saw fear behind her eyes. She spoke slowly, her voice lowered to a near whisper.

"Nothing—nothing you have to worry about, Jack. It's just—" And then she was past me, into her new room.

"Oh, this is so wonderful. It's so huge—and all mine. I'll have to get some curtains from your mother and . . ."

I was never alone with Shareen again after that first night. Mother and Father were constantly about, making certain that she was clean, that she ate, that she was happy.

Mother took Shareen's dress away from her and gave her a pair of my jeans and an old shirt. With shoes on her feet and her hair pulled back in a tidy knot, she looked very much like a strong young farmhand. Father said that Shareen would be a very pretty young lady in a few years. It wasn't that easy to tell.

As soon as supper was over, Shareen started to yawn. She excused herself and went upstairs to her room. I sat on the living room floor, looking through my birthday presents, waiting impatiently for the discussion that I knew would be coming. But Mother and Evelyn seemed preoccupied with something on the television and Father was in his chair,

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looking through the Omaha Sunday paper, which had just arrived. I was puzzled. There seemed to be so much to talk about, and yet everyone acted as if everything were normal.

Evelyn had given me a heavy cotton workshirt as a present. It wouldn't be of much use during the summer, but it would be a handy thing to have later in the year. Mother had given me a couple of books—she always did. They were a hint that I should spend more time inside, improving my mind, and less time outside, fishing and riding and playing. Father's present had been a new bicycle, a tall red English racer. It sat outside, leaning against the house. It would have to be my last bike. Next time, I'd need a car.

There was a brief commercial break on the television. Evelyn left the room for a snack. In his corner, I could hear Father laying aside his newspaper. He was ready to start talking.

"I don't understand this girl," he said. "She seems nice enough, but I just don't understand what she's doing here."

Mother answered him with a puzzled frown. "Didn't you hear her? She's my brother Al's little girl. He sent her up here for the summer."

"Al's girl?" Father rubbed a hand across his chin and shook his head. "I don't remember her saying anything like that."

"She said it all right. She's Al's girl."

"Well, why didn't he tell us the girl was coming? Just letting her drop by here isn't right."

Mother sighed. "Oh, you know how he's been ever since Lynn died. He can't think straight half the time. She won't be any bother. We'll just let her be."

"Well, I just don't think—"

"Hush, Father."

The TV program had started again. With a sigh of resignation, Father went back to his paper. Everything seemed settled. Shareen was not mentioned again that evening.

The next morning, I was supposed to help Father with the harvesting. But I'd stayed up later than usual, and Mother decided to let me sleep. I was late getting down to the breakfast table and Shareen was already there ahead of me.

"Let's go riding," she said, as I sat down and started in on my cereal. "Just the two of us. I have a million things to tell you."

"I can't," I said. "I have to go out and help Father."

"Oh, don't worry about that. He won't even miss you. Eat your food and come along."

I nodded, somehow convinced that she was right and that Father wouldn't notice my absence.

"Shareen?" I started.

"Yes?"

"Are you Uncle Al's daughter? I didn't know he had one."

She laughed. "That's one of the things I want to tell you. Come on, hurry it up. Let's get going. Oh—no, no. Go ahead and finish your cereal. We aren't in that big of a hurry."

I quickly finished the rest of my breakfast and the two of us headed outside toward the barn, where the riding ponies were kept.

"You can have Evelyn's pony, if you want," I said. "She's gone over to the Baxters' to play with their kids and probably won't make it back here till nearly dark."

We saddled our mounts in the early morning dimness of the barn. I took Stallion, a strong old palomino that Father had given me two years ago at

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Christmas. Evelyn's pony, Patches, was only a couple years old, but quiet and gentle, a fine horse for a beginner. Watching Shareen ride along at a gallop in front of me, it would have been hard to guess that she and the pony had not been together for years.

We stopped at the creek, watching it wind its meandering path through the farm. We lay beneath the branches of a large elm, flat on our backs, letting the light breeze wipe the hotness of the ride from our brows. From the distance came the steady hum of the harvesting machinery. Other than that, all was peaceful silence. Neither of us seemed to want to break the stillness of the moment by being the first to speak.

"Shareen," I said, at last, "you said you had something you wanted to tell me. If you don't feel like—"

"Oh, no," she said. "I want to talk." Her voice was soft, seeming to blend with the calmness of the breeze. "It was just that the silence was so wonderful. I didn't want to break it."

She rolled on her side, facing me, her hair falling loosely across her face, covering one eye. She was smiling, but behind it, I felt a seriousness that I'd not seen in her before.

"I really don't know how to begin this, Jack. I shouldn't even be talking to you. But I have to tell someone. You know how it is when you have a secret? How it just sits inside you, trying as hard as it can to break out?"

"But why tell me your secret? Why not Mother or . . . somebody else?"

"She wouldn't understand. I don't think anybody else would either, not unless I made them. They'd just think I was a little crazy."

"You're not—are you?"

She started to laugh, then caught herself. She rolled to her back again, picking a thin strand of grass off the ground and putting it between her lips. She chewed on it, watching the tree above as it moved with the wind.

"Sometimes I wish I was crazy," she said. "Sometimes I think it would make a lot of people feel better."

I said nothing, waiting for her to continue. Suddenly, I felt very cold and maybe a little afraid.

"There's something that's going to happen, Jack, something terrible. I guess you could call it a disaster. It isn't going to hurt just you and your family. In some way or another, it's going to touch everyone in the entire world. A lot of people are going to die. An awful lot of people. I think you know what I'm talking about. It's something that everyone knows is coming. Something that has to happen. But it is so terrible, so unthinkable, that it's been ignored. Now it's coming for sure and nothing can stop it."

I knew what she meant. "But can't you stop it?" I suddenly felt that Shareen was a mountain of power and strength. I had the utmost faith in her ability to perform the grandest of miracles.

"I can't. Nobody can. It has to happen."

"When?"

"Soon. I can't tell you exactly. But very soon. There's hardly enough time for anything."

"Am I going to die?"

"You should. All of you should. Everyone on this world should be dead the day after it happens. But we can't let that happen. It's really not your fault. Something went wrong with your people many millions of years ago and it set you on a path that had to end here. Mankind isn't evil. At least, I don't think so. We

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can't sit back and let all of you perish. That isn't our way."

"Who are you?"

"Just some people. The Gozniks—those are the ones in charge. I'm not a Goznik. I'm just one of their agents."

"But why are you here, Shareen? How can you help save mankind on this farm? Shouldn't you see the Governor or the President?"

"I'm not here to save mankind, Jack. Just part of it. Your family happens to be one of those parts. Don't ask me why. I guess you must symbolize something, something that has to survive."

"I see," I said. But, of course, I didn't. I thought that she was out of her mind. For a brief moment, I thought that way. Then, just as quickly, I knew that everything she had told me was true.

"You know I'm telling you the truth, don't you?"

I told her that I did.

"And you won't tell anyone what I just told you? Nobody. Not even your family. Not anybody. They wouldn't believe you. They'll find out soon enough themselves."

I promised not to say anything.

She jumped to her feet and walked to the horses. I followed her. The harvesting machine had stopped. I hated the suddenness of the silence.

"Shareen—can I ask you one more thing?"

"Sure."

"How many people are you—are the Gozniks—going to save?"

"I don't know the exact number. But not many. A few here, a few there. Just enough to get things going afterward. It's called a 'representative sampling.' "

The summer months, always a busy time for us, passed quickly. The lengthened days only meant that more things could be accomplished. I'd have long since forgotten about the disaster, if Shareen hadn't been around as a constant reminder.

I spent most of my time in the fields, helping Father and the hired hands with the crops. They were larger that year than any of us could remember. Usually, we sold all that we couldn't eat. But for once, Father had most of the surplus stored in the siloes against what he called "a rainy day." When I looked at Shareen, I knew what he meant and I knew that his "rainy day" was quickly approaching.

Shareen spent more time with Evelyn than she did with me. The two of them would help Mother with the housecleaning and then disappear for the rest of the day. Under Shareen's wing, Evelyn blossomed, losing much of her shyness. She laughed and smiled, talking and playing with the rest of us.

Underneath the barn, Father had had a deep basement constructed several years ago. He called it his "tornado shelter," although it had never been used for anything except as a good hiding place for hide-and-seek. Early one evening, when no one else was about, I happened to wander down there. I wasn't surprised to discover that the once barren shelves were now jammed with canned goods—fruits, vegetables, and cold dinners. A freezer had been installed in one corner and inside it were tall stacks of frozen foods. A small gas stove huddled against one wall and there were four cots, neatly made and ready for sleeping, resting on the cold floor.

That night, I asked Father about it. "I just had a feeling that we might be in for a rough season this year," he said. "I thought it was a good idea to be on the safe side."

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The weeks rolled past, the nights grew longer, and the work grew less. Fires burned once again in the fireplace. Shareen stayed on, no one commenting on the lateness of her summer visit. Mother began to make plans for the school year, including Shareen as a matter of course. Why, certainly she'd be staying. There was more than enough food to fill the extra mouth. Uncle Al hadn't been a reliable man ever since Aunt Lynn's death. Lately, he'd fallen completely to pieces, drinking and running around. Couldn't really blame him—it had been a terrible blow. But, just the same, it was better for the girl if she stayed. In another two or three years, she'd be old enough to take care of herself. Until then, she wouldn't be that much of a bother.

The State Fair was allowed to pass. Once it had been the single most important event of our year. Now it was hardly even noticed. Father said that he'd won more than enough ribbons in the previous years. He didn't need any more. The Fair was the same year after year. It wouldn't hurt us to miss this one. I'd long since forgotten about the sow that I'd been raising with an eye toward a possible prize.

But the annual Chamber of Commerce dance was something else. It was held right in town and couldn't be so easily ignored. Every person within twenty miles would be at the dance. Our absence would be noticed.

It was the second to the last weekend of summer when the five of us clamored aboard the station wagon for the trip to town. It wasn't until then that I realized that I hadn't left the farm all summer. Normally, I tried to make it into town at least once a week. There were friends from school to visit, stores to browse through, and perhaps a good movie to watch.

But such things no longer seemed very important. The newspaper headlines had grown increasingly ominous as the summer progressed. Shareen would be leaving us shortly. I wondered whether we were ready.

As we walked toward the Guard Armory, we were greeted by the sound of loud music and high voices. Couples sat on the lawn, laughing, drinking beer from cans and bottles.

Inside, we were warmly welcomed. So many people hadn't seen us in such a long time. Shareen was introduced and she nodded politely to dozens of people she'd never see again. Yes, there certainly was a strong family resemblance. She would so enjoy going to school here and meeting all sorts of new people.

Mother and Father drifted away toward the Social Hall in which a large orchestra, imported all the way from Omaha for the occasion, played soft dance music for the pleasure of the adults.

I allowed myself to join a group of school friends and we talked about the summer, where we had gone, what we had done, and with whom we had done it. There was school to think about and, of course, football and basketball. Everyone wanted to know about Shareen. Where was she from? What was she doing here? What was she like? Strangers were such a rarity. More often than not, a person graduated from high school in the same group with whom he had attended the first grade. I forgot about headlines of disaster as I watched the older boys and girls prancing across the dance floor, passing off partners, clapping their hands, and swinging. It was a happy moment and I never wanted it to end.

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I felt someone tugging at my sleeve and, when I turned, I saw that it was Shareen. She was standing outside the circle of boys, trying to get my attention, looking forlorn and abandoned. I'd forgotten her completely, and so, undoubtedly, had Evelyn. Feeling guilty for having left her alone in the midst of strangers, I pulled myself away from the boys and followed her to a deserted corner.

"I'm sorry I left you. I just got—"

"That's not it, Jack. I don't care about being left alone. It's something else. I think I'm in trouble."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

"Do you see that man over there?" I followed her pointing finger. There was a man leaning against the far wall, his eyes lazily following the movements of the dancers. He was a midget, not much taller than Evelyn, plump and heavy, a big black cigar jutting from one corner of his mouth.

"He's a stranger to me," I said. "If I'd ever seen him before, I know I'd remember him."

"Has anyone seen him before? I have to know. If he's who I think—"

"Just a second," I said. Crossing the room, I looked for a thin white-haired man. I found him, sitting alone, watching the dancers with a scowl on his face.

"Hello, Mr. Bridges," I said. "Can I ask you a question?"

He focused his attention on me, his eyes squinting in the darkened room. "You're Jack Allen, ain't you?"

"Right. Do you know that man over there—the midget?" Mr. Bridges knew everyone in town and everything there was to know about them.

"I think I do. Funny looking little guy. Yeah, I remember him now. Some sort of salesman. Showed up about a week ago. Been staying at the hotel. Nobody seems to like him much."

I thanked him for the information and went quickly back to Shareen.

"That's what I thought," she said, after I'd relayed the information. "I knew he wasn't from around here." She paused for a moment, again staring at the midget. Their eyes met and locked.

"Jack, get your coat. We've got to get out of here."

"Go? How? I can't drive."

"You won't have to. Here come your mother and father. Just get ready. I want to get out of here immediately."

Mother and Father were cutting a path through the dancers. The midget watched them, puffing on his cigar, his face without expression.

"We've got to get going, kids," Mother said. "You know we've got a million things to do tomorrow. Have you seen Evelyn? I hate to try to find her in this crowd. Oh, wait. Here she comes now."

We said our good-byes as quickly as possible and headed outside, the music following us across the lawn and into the car. During the silent ride home, no one seemed to have anything to say. I knew there was nothing to bring us home early, no work that had to be done, no errands that could not wait. No, it was the midget. He was the only reason for our silent ride home.

When we arrived at the farm, I followed Shareen upstairs to her room. Below, I could hear the hum of the television and the murmur of soft voices.

And Shareen was afraid.

"What's this all about?" I wanted to know. "Why won't you tell me?"

"It's nothing you need to know about, Jack. I've already told you more than I should. There's nothing you can do. You'll have to let me handle it."

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"I think you're afraid."

"I am."

"And you don't want any help?"

"No."

"But who is he? You can tell me that."

"He's a Moantaur."

"A what?"

"A Moantaur. They're a people—a lot like the Gozniks—who happen to think differently. They don't believe in helping people, in stepping in. I didn't even know they were here. The Gozniks promised they'd let us alone."

"Not all midgets are Moantaurs, are they?"

"That has nothing to do with it. Have you noticed how I can make people do what I want them to do? Like your father. He's storing grain and making the basement into a shelter."

"I've noticed. How do you do it?"

"I . . . I communicate with people. I let them see my thoughts and make them act upon them."

"You read minds?"

"No, I don't actually read them. I—Well, it isn't important. I tried to communicate with the midget—and I couldn't get in. His mind was blocked. Only two sorts of people can do that: Gozniks and Moantaurs. I knew the midget wasn't a Goznik."

"But what's he doing here?"

"He's come to stop me. That's the only possible reason. He's been sent here to make sure I don't get my job done."

"Kill you?"

"That's right. Kill me. Now do you see why I'm afraid?"

"But isn't there anything—?"

"No. Please—let me alone, Jack. I have to think."

Reluctantly, I left her lying on the bed, her eyes focused on the cracks in the ceiling.

I wanted to get up early the next morning, hoping that I could get downstairs before Shareen. But my mind was so agitated that sleep was difficult. By the time I got downstairs, it was nearly nine o'clock. Mother was alone at the breakfast table, scanning the morning mail.

"Where's Shareen?" I asked.

"Haven't seen her. She's usually up by now. Last night must have tired her out."

I knew something was wrong. Slowly, I headed for the stairs. I knocked on Shareen's door and, receiving no answer, went inside. The room was empty, the bed still made. I took one look and ran for the kitchen.

"Mother," I said, "she's not there. Shareen's gone."

"Gone? What do you mean?"

"She's not there. She's not in her bed."

"Oh, she must have gotten up early; that's all. She's always been an early riser."

"No—you don't understand. She didn't sleep at all. Her bed's still made. She's in trouble."

"Trouble? What makes you think she's in trouble?"

"I . . ." I stopped. I couldn't tell Mother. There was no way to make her understand.

"I can't understand what could have gotten into the girl. Didn't she act a little peculiar to you last night?"

"A little, I guess."

"Did to me, too. I always said she was an odd one. I just hope she didn't get it into her head to run away to Al. Don't know why she should. We've given her the best of care. Would have given her the money, too, for that matter. No reason for her to go sneaking off in the middle of the night."

Mother went to the sink and began

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washing the breakfast dishes. I sat down at the table and stared at my cold cereal.

"You don't know what could have gotten into the girl, do you, Jack? She always talked to you."

"No," I said. "I just don't know."

"Strange girl. I never did quite understand her."

I stayed in the house all day, trying to read, trying to watch television, trying to do anything that might take my mind off Shareen. But it was impossible. Earlier, I'd checked the barn and found Patches missing. Wherever Shareen had gone, she planned to return. Otherwise, she'd never have taken the horse.

The television remained off that night as all of us waited in the living room, trying to act unconcerned, but thinking only of Shareen.

The hours passed slowly. I was almost ready to give up when I heard the sound for which I'd been waiting—a short, hesitant tapping at the front door. I turned my head, watching, as the knob slowly moved and the door popped open.

Shareen walked inside, smiling at each of us in turn, a little shyly perhaps, as if she were a bit ashamed of herself. It was almost as if we were reliving the afternoon when she'd first entered our lives. She was wearing her old plaid dress again, now more worn and soiled than ever. Mud and dirt covered her face in thick, dark streaks. Her shoes were gone, her bare feet black with filth.

Mother was the first to speak. "Close that door and come here, girl. Where on earth have you been? You're an awful mess, don't you know."

"I know, Mrs. Allen. I was out riding and I must have fallen off my horse. I was lost and couldn't find my way back here."

"Are you all right?" Father asked. "You're not hurt, are you?"

"No, I don't think so. I'm a little tired. That's all. I hope I haven't worried you."

"Jack said you didn't sleep in your bed last night."

"I was so tired after the dance that I fell asleep on top of the covers. I got up early this morning and went riding. Didn't Jack tell you that Patches was missing?"

"Well, you better get yourself cleaned up and have some food. And make sure you take that old dress off. I don't see why you like to wear that old rag."

"Yes, Mrs. Allen."

As she passed me, I whispered: "Is it all right? Did you get him?"

"Not yet." She smiled. "But I'm ready for him."

It wasn't until two days after Shareen's disappearance that the Moantaur came to call. Mother and Father left for town early that morning, taking Evelyn with them. They'd suddenly remembered a great deal of shopping that had to be accomplished immediately. I was supposed to go with them but, knowing what was coming, I didn't intend to miss it. I complained of a headache and stayed at home.

"You know why they're leaving, don't you?" Shareen asked, as the car disappeared down the road.

"I know."

"I wish you hadn't stayed. I ought to have forced you to go. If I lose any of my family, I'll catch hell from the Gozniks. But I suppose if the Moantaur gets me, it won't much matter."

"Can't you handle him?"

"I think I can. But I won't be certain till he's been here and gone."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'm going upstairs. You wait down here and watch the road. When you see something coming, yell at me. Then get out of the way."

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The minutes passed as I stared out the front window, my eyes locked to the road. It was a hot, dry day. The wind was blowing and the air was full of dust. An hour went by without a sign of the Moantaur.

Then I saw it. A large cloud of dust moved along the road, heading toward the farm. As I watched, a small car took shape, moving rapidly.

I shouted upstairs: "Car coming."

The car swerved into the driveway and pulled to a stop, dust swirling in all directions. The midget jumped out from behind the steering wheel and slammed the door shut. Momentarily, he paused and looked around. Then he moved toward the house.

Shareen came downstairs, letting each foot land solidly on a step before proceeding to the next. She acted as if she were unable to focus all of her attention on walking; that a part of her mind was somewhere else.

"He doesn't have a gun," I told her. "Not unless he's got it hidden."

"He doesn't need a gun." She spoke slowly, with care. "I want you to do what I say. When he gets to the door, throw it open. Then, quick, before he sees you, get out of the way."

The midget moved quickly across the lawn, his steps firm and heavy. When I heard his foot hit the bottom step, I closed the curtain and walked to the door. When I heard him reach the top of the porch, I grabbed the knob and opened the door.

I was looking straight into his eyes, miniature whirlpools that sucked me down.

"Jack! Move! Get out of the way!"

The spell broken, I moved, rolling to my side, cracking my head against the wall.

I turned to look, expecting a fight, a massive struggle. Instead, there was nothing, only the two of them, their eyes looked, unmoving.

"I've been sent to take you back," said the Moantaur. "If you don't—" He stopped, staggered, and nearly fell, catching his balance on the open door.

"You're not supposed to . . ." His voice was faint, barely more than a whisper. Shareen did not move. There was something about the Moantaur . . . Then I realized what it was.

His body was losing form, growing fainter. Before my eyes, he was disappearing.

Shareen's face grew pale, as if all the blood were being drained by some tremendous exertion. Her lips contorted in an agonized grimace and her hands clutched tightly at her dress.

The Moantaur grew fainter. He was little more than an outline now. I could see the door behind him and, past that, the clear afternoon sky.

His mouth twisted soundlessly, trying to form words.

"You can't . . ." he managed, but that was all. Seconds later, he was gone. There was nothing left.

I got to my feet and closed the door. Outside, there was nothing. The car was gone. There were no tire tracks, no footprints.

"How?" I asked.

"A gift from the Gozniks," Shareen said. She leaned against the stairway railing, propping herself up. "A power that . . . Jack, help me to bed. I'm very weak. I can hardly stand."

I ran forward and caught her arm. I helped her upstairs to her room. I dropped her on the bed and she fell instantly asleep.

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The following Saturday afternoon at three o'clock, it happened.

We were waiting in the house. Shareen had warned us that our time was short. A half an hour before it happened, she came for us, wearing her plaid dress once again. It had been cleaned and pressed, and there were neat patches covering the worst of the tears.

"We have to go now," she said. "It's nearly time."

One by one, we filed out the door and crossed the distance to the barn. I watched as everyone else went inside and down to the basement.

When Shareen and I were alone, I asked, "How long?"

"A few more minutes."

It was a warm, sunny day and the clouds rolled slowly across the blue sky. In the distance, a bird sang and a cricket chirped.

"Is there anything you have to tell me? Anything about afterward?"

"I shouldn't—" She shook her head. "But I guess it doesn't matter now. There's a forcefield around the farm. Don't try to go outside it. You should only be here a couple weeks. Then the Gozniks will come to get you."

"Come for us? But I thought we'd stay here and build—"

"Build a new civilization? That's what they always seem to think. Don't be silly. There's nothing left to build one from. Even if there were, you and your family could hardly do it. Don't worry. You'll be better off where you're going."

"And where's that?"

"Another place. Another world. A sanctuary for the homeless."

And then it came. The sky flickered in the East, then burst into crimson flames. The wind howled; trees and bushes escaped from the ground and floated through the air. Shareen and I stood at the eye of the storm, watching the raging waters foam around us. Within the farm, birds sang and crickets wailed. The air was cool, and the air was pure.

"It's our way," I said. "We should be out there."

"It's not a war," she said.

"But the headlines said—"

"Don't the headlines always say that?"

"Yes, but—"

"Just accept it for what it is—the end and the beginning and, perhaps, the middle. Just accept."

For an hour, we watched the sky, a glorious pageant of raging colors. It ravaged and destroyed, then simmered and died.

When the sky faded to a dismal gray, I turned to ask Shareen a question. But she was gone.

I shrugged and went into the cellar to wait for our deliverance.

—Gordon Eklund

NEXT ISSUE IN THE OCTOBER FANTASTIC

"The Crimson Witch" by Dean R. Koontz—a complete-in-one-issue 45,000-word novel of adventure and enchantment! Also: "A Glance at the Past" by David R. Bunch, "As Between Generations" by Barry M. Malzberg, and "The Movement" by Greg Benford! Plus: Alexei Panshin's column, the return of Fritz Leiber's book reviews, and another Fantastic Illustrated feature!

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SAY GOODBY TO THE WIND

J. G. BALLARD

Illustrated by JUDY MITCHELL

Come to Vermilion Sands, where J. G. Ballard weaves a strange tale of social and scientific extrapolation with the haunting moodiness of an underwater dream . . . a tale of bio-fabrics, clothes that have a life of their own, and the way they use their owners; and of a teeny-bopper sex-goddess, who dances late at night, alone, in an abandoned night-club to the tune of an old phonograph record . . .

AT MIDNIGHT I heard music playing from the abandoned nightclub among the dunes at Lagoon West. Each evening the frayed melody had awakened me as I slept in my villa above the beach. As it started once again I stepped from the balcony onto the warm sand and walked along the shore. In the darkness the beachcombers stood by the tideline, listening to the music carried towards them on the thermal rollers. My torch lit up the broken bottles and hypodermic vials at their feet. Wearing their dead motley, they waited in the dim air like faded clowns.

The nightclub had been deserted since the previous summer, its white walls covered by the dunes. The clouded letters of a neon sign tilted over the open-air bar. The music came from a record-player on the stage, a foxtrot I had forgotten years before. Through the sand-strewn tables walked a young woman with coralline hair, crooning to herself as she gestured with jewelled hands to the rhythm of this antique theme. Her downward eyes and reflective step, like those of a pensive child, made me guess that she was sleepwalking, drawn to this abandoned nightclub from one of the mansions along the shore.

Beside me, near the derelict bar, stood one of the beachcombers. His dead clothes hung on his muscular body like the husk of some violated fruit. The oil on his dark chest lit up his drug-filled eyes, giving his broken face a moment of lucid calm. As the young woman danced by herself in her black nightgown he stepped forward and took her arms. Together they circled the wooden floor, her jewelled hand on his scarred shoulder. When the record ended she turned from him, her face devoid of expression, and walked among the tables into the darkness.

Who was my beautiful neighbour,

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moving with the certainty of a sleepwalker, who danced each evening with the beachcombers at the deserted nightclub? As I drove into Vermilion Sands the following morning I peered into the villas along the shore in the hope of seeing her again, but the beach was a zone of late-risers still asleep under their sealed awnings. The season at Vermilion Sands was now in full swing. Tourists filled the cafe terraces and the curio shops selling singing flowers and sonic sculpture. After two or three hectic weeks at festivals devoted to everything from non-aural music to erotic food, most of them would jettison their purchases from their car windows as they sped back to the safety of Red Beach. Running to seed in the sand-reefs on the fringes of Vermilion Sands, the singing flowers and sculpture formed the unique flora of the landscape, an island ringed by strange sounds.

My own boutique, "Topless in Gaza," which specialized in bio-fabric fashions, I had opened two years earlier. When I reached the arcade near Beach Drive at eleven o'clock that morning a small crowd was already peering through the window, fascinated by the Op Art patterns unfurling as the model gowns on display flexed and arched themselves in the morning sunlight. My partner, Georges Conte, his art nouveau eye-patch raised over his left eye, was settling an electric-yellow beach robe onto its stand. For some reason the fabric was unusually skittish, clinging to him like a neurotic dowager. Gripping the wrists with one hand, Georges forced it onto its stand, then stepped back before it could clutch at him again. The robe switched irritably from side to side, the fabric pulsing like an inflamed sun.

As I entered the shop I could see it was going to be one of our more difficult days.

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Usually I arrived to find the gowns and robes purring on their hangers like the drowsy inmates of some exquisite arboreal zoo. Today something had disturbed them. The racks of model dresses were seething, their patterns livid and discordant. Whenever they touched, the fabrics recoiled from each other like raw membranes. The beach-clothes were in an equal state of unrest, the bandanas and sun-suits throwing off eye-jarring patterns like exhibits in some demented kinetic art.

Hands raised in a gesture of heroic despair, Georges Conte came over to me. His white silk suit glimmered like a bilious rainbow. Even my own mauve day-shirt was unsettled, its seams beginning to shred and unravel.

"Georges, what's happening? The whole place is in uproar!"

"Mr. Samson, I wash my hands of them! Sheer temperament, they're impossible to deal with!"

He looked down at his dappled sleeve, and tried to flick away the livid colours with a manicured hand. Upset by the disturbed atmosphere, his suit was expanding and contracting in irregular pulses, pulling across his chest like the fibres of a diseased heart. With a burst of exasperation he picked one of the model gowns from its rack and shook it angrily. "Quiet!" he shouted, like an impresario calling an unruly chorus line to order. "Is this 'Topless in Gaza' or a demonic zoo?"

In the two years that I had known him Georges had always referred to the dresses and gowns as if they were a troupe of human performers. The more expensive and sensitive fabrics bred from the oldest pedigree stocks he would treat with the charm and savoir faire he might have reserved for a temperamental duchess. At the opposite extreme, the flamboyant Op Art beachwear he handled with the cavalier charm he displayed to the teenage beauties who often strayed by accident into the boutique.

Sometimes I wondered if for Georges the gowns and suits were more alive than their purchasers. I suspected that he regarded the eventual wearers as little more than animated cheque-books whose sole function was to feed and exercise the exquisite creatures he placed upon their backs. Certainly a careless or offhand customer who made the mistake of trying to climb into a wrong fitting or, even worse, was endowed with a figure of less than Dietrich-like proportions, would receive brusque treatment from Georges and be directed with the shot of a lace cuff to the inert-wear shops in the town's amusement park.

This, of course, was a particularly bitter jibe. No one, with the exception of a few eccentrics or beachcombers, any longer wore inert clothing. The only widely worn inert garment was the shroud, and even here most fashionable people would not be seen dead in one. (However, the macabre spectacle of the strange grave-flora springing from cracked tombs, like the nightmare collection of some Quant or Dior of the netherworld, had soon put an end to all forms of bio-fabric coffin-wear and firmly established the principle: 'naked we came into this world, naked we leave it'.)

Georges's devotion had been largely responsible for the success and select clientele of the boutique, and I was only too glad to indulge his whimsical belief in the individual personality of each gown and dress. His slim fingers could coax a hemline to shorten itself within seconds instead of hours, take in a pleat or enlarge a gusset almost before the customer could sign her cheque. A particularly exotic

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gown, unsettled by being worn for the first time or upset by the clammy contact of human skin, would be soothed and consoled by Georges as he patted it into place around its owner's body, his gentle hands caressing the nervous tissues around the unfamiliar contours of hip and bust.

Today, however, his charm and expertise had failed him. The racks of gowns itched and quivered, their colours running into blurred pools. One drawback of bio-fabrics is their extreme sensitivity. Bred originally from the gene-stocks of delicate wistarias and mimosas, the woven yarns have brought with them something of the vine's remarkable response to atmosphere and touch. The sudden movement of someone nearby, let alone of the wearer, brings an immediate reply from the nerve-like tissues. A dress can change its colour and texture in a few seconds, becoming more decollete at the approach of an eager admirer, more formal at a chance meeting with a bank manager.

This sensitivity to mood explains the real popularity of bio-fabrics. Clothes are no longer made from dead fibres of fixed colour and texture that can approximate only crudely to the vagrant human figure, but from living tissues that adapt themselves to the contours and personality of the wearer. Other advantages are the continued growth of the materials, fed by the body odours and perspiration of the wearer, and sweet liqueurs distilled from her own pores, and the constant renewal of the fibres, repairing any faults or ladders and eliminating the need for washing.

However, as I walked around the shop that morning I reflected that these immense advantages had been bought at a price. For some reason we had accumulated a particularly temperamental collection. Cases had been reported of sudden panics caused by the backfiring of an engine, in which an entire stock of model gowns had destroyed themselves in a paroxysm of violence, converting themselves in a few seconds into what looked like a collection of boiled hats.

I was about to suggest to Georges that we close the shop for the morning when I noticed that the first customer of the day had already arrived. Partly concealed by the racks of beach wear, I could only see an elegantly groomed face veiled by a white-brimmed hat. Near the doorway a young chauffeur waited in the sunlight, surveying the tourists with a bored glance.

At first I was annoyed that a wealthy customer should arrive at the very moment when our stock was restive—I still remembered with a shudder the bikini of nervous weave that shed itself around its owner's ankles as she stood on the high diving-board above the crowded pool at the Neptune Hotel. I turned to ask Georges to use all his tact to get her to leave.

For once, however, he had lost his aplomb. Leaning forwards from the waist, eyes focussed myopically, he was gazing at our customer like a seedy voyeur of the boulevards starstruck by some sub-teen nymphet.

"Georges! Pull yourself together! Do you know her?"

He glanced at me with blank eyes. "What?" Already his suit had begun to smooth itself into a glass-like mirror, his invariable response when faced with a beautiful woman. He murmured: "Miss Channing."

"Who?"

"Raine Channing . . ." he repeated.

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"Before your time, Mr. Samson, before anyone's time . . ."

I let him walk past me, hands outstretched in the attitude of Parsifal approaching the Holy Grail. Certainly I remembered her, sometime international model and epitome of eternal youthfulness, with her melancholy gamin face recreated by a dozen plastic surgeries. Raine Channing was a macabre relic of the 1970's and its teenage cult. Where, in the past, elderly screen actresses had resorted to plastic surgery to lift a sagging cheek or erase a telltale wrinkle, in the case of Raine Channing a young model in her early twenties had surrendered her face to the scalpel and needle in order to recapture the child-like bloom of a teenage ingenue. As many as a dozen times she had gone back to the operating theatre, emerging swathed in bandages that were rolled back before the arc-lights to reveal a frozen teenage mask. In her grim way, perhaps she had helped to kill this lunatic cult. For some years now she had been out of the public eye, and I remembered only a few months beforehand reading about the death of her confidante and impresario, the brilliant young couturier and designer of the first bio-fabric fashions, Gavin Kaiser.

Although now in her late twenties, Raine Channing still preserved her child-like appearance, this strange montage of adolescent faces superimposed on her melancholy eyes. In her gaze she carried the latent suicide of Marilyn Monroe. As she spoke to Georges in her low voice I realized where I had seen her, dancing with the beachcombers in the deserted nightclub at Lagoon West.

When I bought the boutique the faded fashion magazines had been filled with her photographs . . . Raine with her wounded eyes, looking out above the bandages around her re-made cheeks, or wearing the latest bio-fabric creation at some exclusive discotheque, smiling into Kaiser's handsome gangster face. In many ways the relationship between Raine Channing and this 25-year-old genius of the fashion houses summed up a whole disastrous epoch, of which Raine's mutilated face was a forgotten shrine. One day soon, before she reached the age of thirty, even that face would dissolve.

However, as she visited our boutique this grim prospect seemed a long way distant. Georges was delighted to see her, at last meeting on equal terms one of the too-bright luminaries of his apprenticeship. Without a thought for our disturbed stock, he opened the windows and display cases. Curiously, everything had quietened, the gowns stirring gently on their hangers like docile birds.

I waited for Georges to enjoy his moment of reminiscence, and then introduced myself.

"You've calmed everything down," I congratulated her. "They must like you."

She drew her white fox collar around herself, rubbing her cheek against it. The fur slid around her neck and shoulders, nestling her in its caress. "I hope so," she said. "Do you know, though, a few months ago I hated them. I really wanted everyone in the world to go naked, so that all the clothes would die." She laughed at this. "Now I've got to look for a whole new wardrobe."

"We're delighted you've started here, Miss Channing. Are you staying long in Vermilion Sands?"

"A little while. I first came here a long time ago, Mr. Samson. Nothing in Vermilion Sands ever changes, have you noticed? It's a good place to come back to."

We walked along the displays of gowns.

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Now and then she would reach out to stroke one of the fabrics, her white hand like a child's. As she opened her coat a sonic jewel, like a crystal rose, emitted its miniature music between her breasts. Velvet play-toys nestled like voles around her wrists. Altogether she seemed to be concealed in this living play-nest like some bizarre infant Venus.

What was it, though, about Raine Channing that so held me? As Georges helped her select a brilliant pastel gown, the other dresses murmuring on the chairs around her, it occurred to me that Raine Channing resembled a child-Eve in a couture Eden, life springing from her touch. Then I remembered her dancing with the beachcombers in the deserted nightclub at Lagoon West.

While the young chauffeur carried out her purchases I said: "I saw you last night. At the nightclub by the beach."

For the first time she looked directly into my face, her eyes alert and adult above the white adolescent mask. "I live nearby, in one of the houses along the lake. There was music playing and people dancing."

As the chauffeur opened the door of the car for her I saw that the seats were filled with playtoys and sonic jewels. They drove off together like adults playing at children.

Two days later I heard music coming again from the abandoned nightclub. As I sat on the veranda in the evening this faint night-music began, the dry metallic sounds muffled by the powdery air. I walked along the shore through the darkness. The beachcombers had gone, but Raine Channing wandered through the tables of the nightclub, her white gown drawing empty signatures in the sand.

A sand-yacht was beached in the shallows. Beside it a bare-chested young man watched with hands on hips. His powerful thighs stood out under his white shorts in the darkness, the thermal surf breaking the dust into ripples around his feet. With his broad face and smashed Michaelangelesque nose he resembled some dark beach angel. He waited as I approached, then stepped forward and walked across me, almost brushing my shoulder. The oil on his back reflected the distant lights of Vermilion Sands as he moved among the dunes toward the nightclub.

After this strange rendezvous I assumed that we would see no more of Raine Channing, but the next morning when I arrived at the shop in Vermilion Sands I found Georges waiting nervously by the door.

"Mr. Samson, I tried to telephone you—Miss Channing's secretary has been calling, everything she bought has gone berserk! Nothing fits, three of the gowns are growing out of weave—"

I managed to calm him down, then spoke to Raine's secretary, a tart-toned Frenchwoman who sharply informed me that the entire wardrobe of two evening gowns, a cocktail dress and three day suits which Raine had purchased from "Topless in Gaza" had run to seed. Why this should have happened she had no idea. "However, Mr. Samson, I suggest you drive out immediately to Miss Channing's residence and either replace each item or reimburse the total purchase price of six thousand dollars. The alternative—"

"Mlle. Fournier," I insisted stiffly with what little pride I could muster, "there is no alternative."

Before I left, Georges brought out with

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elaborate care a cyclamen sports-suit in a shantung bio-fabric which he had ordered for one of our millionaire customers.

"For my good name, Mr. Samson, if not for yours—at moments such as these one should show the flag."

The suit clung to me like a willowy, lace-covered cobra, shaping itself to my chest and legs. Its colours glowed and rippled as it explored the contours of my body. As I walked out to my car people turned to look at this exquisite gliding snakeskin.

Five minutes after our arrival at Raine Channing's villa it had quieted down considerably, hanging from my shoulders like a wounded flower. The atmosphere at the villa seemed set for disaster. The young chauffeur who took my car whipped it away with a snarl of tires, his eyes moving across my face like razors. Mlle. Fournier greeted me with a peremptory nod. A sharp-faced Frenchwoman of about forty, she wore a witch-like black dress that seethed around her angular shoulders like a shrike.

"An entire wardrobe ruined, Mr. Samson! Not only your own gowns, but priceless originals from Paris this season. We are out of our minds here!"

I did my best to calm her. One danger with bio-fabrics is that they are prone to stampede. Moments of domestic crisis, a cry of anger or even a door's slam, can set off a paroxysm of self-destruction. My own suit was already wilting under Mlle. Fournier's baleful eye. As we went up the staircase I smoothed the ruffled velvet of the curtains, settling them into their niches. "Perhaps they're not being worn enough," I temporised. "These fabrics do need human contact."

Mlle. Fournier gave me a surprisingly arch glance. We entered a suite on the top floor. Beyond the shaded windows was a verd-antique terrace, the painted surface of the sand-lake below it. Mlle. Fournier gestured at the open wardrobes in the large dressing-room. "Human contact? Precisely, Mr. Samson."

Everywhere there was uproar. Gowns were strewn across the facing chesterfields. Several had lost all colour and lay blanched and inert. Others had felted and died, their edges curled and blackened like dead banana skins. Two evening dresses draped over the escritoire had run rogue, their threads interlocking in a macabre embrace. In the wardrobes the racks of gowns hung in restive files, colours pulsing like demented suns.

As we watched I sensed that they were uneasily settling themselves after some emotional outburst earlier that morning. "Someone's been whipping them into a frenzy," I told Mlle. Fournier. "Doesn't Miss Channing realize one can't play the temperamental fool near these fabrics?"

She gripped my arm, a barbed finger raised to my lips. "Mr. Samson! We all have our difficulties. Just do what you can. Your fee will be paid immediately."

When she had gone I moved along the racks and laid out the more damaged dresses. The others I spaced out, soothing the disturbed fabrics until they relaxed and annealed themselves.

I was hunting through the wardrobes in the bedroom next door when I made a curious discovery. Packed behind the sliding doors was an immense array of costumes, faded models of the previous seasons which had been left to die on their hangers. A few were still barely alive. They hung inertly on their racks, responding with a feeble glimmer to the light.

What surprised me was their condition. All of them had been deformed into strange shapes, their colours bled like

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wounds across the fabric, reflecting the same traumatic past, some violent series of events they had witnessed between Raine Channing and whoever had lived with her in the years past. I remembered the clothes I had seen on a woman killed in a car crash at Vermilion Sands, blooming out of the wreckage like a monstrous flower of hell, and the demented wardrobe offered to me by the family of an heiress who had committed suicide. Memories such as these outlived their wearers. There was the apocryphal story of the murderer absconding in a stolen overcoat who had been strangled by the garment as it recapitulated the death-throes of its owner.

Leaving these uneasy relics to their dark end, I went back to the dressing-room. As I eased the last of the disturbed gowns onto their hangers the terrace door opened behind me.

Raine Channing stepped out of the sun. In place of her clinging white fur she now wore a bio-fabric bikini. The two yellow cups nestled her full breasts like sleeping hands. Despite the clear evidence of some fierce row that morning, she seemed composed and relaxed. As she stared at the now placid tenants of her wardrobe, her white face, like a devious adolescent's, more than ever resembled a surgical mask, the powdered child-face of a Manchu Empress.

"Mr. Samson! They're quiet now! You're like . . ."

"St. Francis calming the birds?" I suggested, still annoyed at having been summoned to Lagoon West. I gestured towards the sealed wardrobes in her bedroom. "Forgive me saying so, but there are strange memories here."

She picked up my jacket and draped it over her naked shoulders, a gesture of false modesty that nonetheless held a certain charm. The fabric clung to her like a huge pink flower, caressing her breasts and arms.

"The past is something of a disaster area, I'm afraid, Mr. Samson. I know I brought you out here under false pretenses. Something went wrong this morning, and you are the only neighbour I have." She walked to the window and gazed over the painted lake. "I came back to Vermilion Sands for reasons that must seem crazy."

I watched her warily, but something about her apparent frankness destroyed caution. Presumably the midnight lover of the sand-yacht had left the scene, no doubt in a holocaust of emotions.

We went onto the terrace and sat in the reclining chairs beside the bar. During the next hours, and the many that followed in that house without mirrors above the painted lake, she told me something of her years with Gavin Kaiser, and how this young genius from the fashion world had found her singing at the open-air nightclub at Lagoon West. Seeing in this beautiful fifteen-year-old the apotheosis of the teenage cult, Kaiser had made her his star model for the bio-fabric fashions he designed. Four years later, at the age of nineteen, she had her first face lift, followed by even more extensive plastic surgery in the years immediately after. When Kaiser died she came back to Lagoon West, to the house near the deserted nightclub.

"I left so many pieces of myself behind in all those clinics and hospitals. I thought perhaps I could find them here."

"How did Kaiser die?" I asked.

"From a heart attack—*they* said. It was some sort of terrible convulsion, as if he'd been bitten by a hundred rabied dogs. He was trying to tear his face to pieces." She

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raised her hands to her own white mask.

"Wasn't there some doubt . . ." I hesitated.

She held my arm. "Gavin was mad! He wanted nothing to change between us. Those face-lifts—he kept me at fifteen not because of the fashion-modelling. He wanted me forever when I first loved him."

At the time, however, I hardly cared why Raine Channing had come back to Lagoon West. Every afternoon I would drive out to her villa and we would lie together under the awning by the bar, watching the changing colours of the painted lake. There, in that house without mirrors, she would tell me her strange dreams, all bound up with her fears of growing young. In the evenings, as the music began to play from the deserted nightclub, we would walk across the dunes and dance among the sand-strewn tables.

Who brought this record-player to the nightclub with its one unlabelled disk? Once, as we walked back, I again saw the young man with the powerful shoulders and broken nose standing by his sand-yacht in the darkness. He watched us as we walked arm in arm, Raine's head against my chest. As she listened to the music jewel in her hand, Raine's eyes stared back like a child's at his handsome face.

Often I would see him at noon, sailing his sand-yacht across the lake a few hundred yards from the shore. I assumed that he was one of Raine's past lovers, watching his successor with a kind of sympathetic curiosity and playing his music for us out of a bizarre sense of humour.

Yet when I pointed him out to Raine one afternoon she denied that she knew him or had even seen him before. Sitting up on one elbow, she watched the sand-yacht beached three hundred yards away along the shore. The young man was walking along the tide-line, searching for something among the broken hypodermic vials.

"I can tell him to go away, Raine." When she shook her head, I said: "He was here. What happened between you?"

She turned on me sharply. "Why do you say that?"

I let it pass. Her eyes followed him everywhere, but I lay back beside her, a piece of the sun in my arms.

Two weeks later I saw him again at closer quarters. Shortly after midnight I woke on the terrace of Raine's villa and heard the familiar music coming from the deserted nightclub. Below, in the dim light, Raine Channing walked towards the dunes. Along the beach the thermal rollers whipped the white sand into fine waves.

The villa was silent. Mlle. Fournier had gone to Red Beach for a few days, and the young chauffeur was asleep in his apartment over the garages. I opened the gates at the end of the dark, rhododendron-filled drive and walked towards the nightclub. The music whined around me over the dead sand.

The nightclub was empty, the record playing to itself on the deserted stage. I wandered through the tables, searching for any sign of Raine. For a few minutes I waited by the bar. Then, as I leaned over the counter, the slim-faced figure of the chauffeur stood up and lunged at me, his right fist aimed at my forehead.

Sidestepping inside his arm, I caught his hand and rammed it onto the counter. In the darkness his small face was twisted in a rictus of anger. He wrenched his arm from me, looking away across the dunes to

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the lake. The music whined on, the record starting again.

I found them by the beach, Raine with her hand on the young man's hip as he bent down to cast off the yacht. Uncertain what to do, and confused by his off-hand manner as he moved around Raine, I stood among the dunes at the top of the beach.

Feet moved through the sand. I was staring down at Raine's face, its white masks multiplying themselves in the moonlight, when someone stepped behind me and struck me above the ear.

I woke on Raine's bed in the deserted villa, the white moonlight like a waiting shroud across the terrace. Around me the shadows of demented shapes seethed along the walls like the deformed inmates of some nightmare aviary. In the silence of the villa I listened to them tearing themselves to pieces, like condemned creatures tormenting themselves on their gibbets.

I climbed from the bed and faced my reflection in the open window. I was wearing a suit of gold lame which shone in the moonlight like the armour of some archangelic spectre come to visit these beasts of hell. Holding my bruised scalp, I walked onto the terrace. The gold suit adhered itself to my body, its lapels caressing my chest.

In the drive Raine Channing's limousine waited among the rhododendrons. At the wheel the slim-faced chauffeur looked up at me with bored eyes.

"Raine!" In the rear seat of the car there was a movement of white-clad thigh, a man's bare-backed figure crouching among the cushions. Angered by having to watch the spectacle below in this preposterous suit, I started to tear it from my shoulders. Before I could shout again to Raine something seized my calves and thighs. I tried to step forward, but my body was clamped in a golden vice. I looked down at the sleeves. The fabric glowed with a fierce luminescence as it contracted around me, its fibres knotting themselves like a thousand zips.

Already breathing in uncertain spasms, I tried to turn, unable to raise my hands to the lapels that gripped my neck. As I toppled forwards onto the rail the headlamps of the car illuminated the drive. It moved slowly across the gravel.

I lay on my back in the gutter, arms clamped behind me. The golden suit glowed in the darkness, its burning light reflected in the thousand glass panes of the house. Somewhere below me the car turned through the gates and roared off into the night.

A few minutes later, as I came back to consciousness, I felt hands pulling at my chest. I was lifted up against the balcony and sat there limply, my bruised ribs moving freely again. The bare-chested young man knelt in front of me, silver blade in hand, cutting away the last golden strips from my legs. The fading remnants of the suit burned like embers on the dark tiles.

He pushed back my forehead and peered into my face, then snapped the blade of his knife. "You looked like a dying angel, Samson."

"For God's sake . . ." I leaned against the rail. A network of weals covered my naked body. "The damn thing was crushing me . . . Who are you?"

"Jason—Jason Kaiser. You've seen me. My brother died in that suit, Samson."

His strong face watched me, the broken nose and broad mouth making a half-formed likeness.

"Kaiser? Do you mean your brother—"

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 134)

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Kyning was a dreamer—the storybook romance of the days of chivalry had sustained him all his life . . . in his dreams. But what of reality? Could he make his last great dream come true—or would it crumble into the Black Knight's defeat with all the others?

ALWAYS THE BLACK KNIGHT

LEE HOFFMAN

Illustrated by GRAY MORROW

(Second of Two Parts)

SYNOPSIS

KYNING came to the planet Elva with DEPTFORT'S HISTORICAL PAGEANT OF CHIVALRY. A traveling Pageant in which mock-battles were fought as they had been fought in the mythical days of Arthur, its climax pitted KYNING, as the Black Knight, against DEPTFORT, the White Knight. They rode—mechanical horses and bled imitation blood in a cleverly scripted performance that would look quite real to the thousands of spectators in the stands. The Black Knight always lost, but this after all was what KYNING was paid for—to lose. Always to lose.

The Pageant had not played the major planets for some years now, and now its mechanisms were all but held together with baling wire. Perhaps it was inevitable that one of the horses should fail in the lists, but—why KYNING's?

The horse stumbled, throwing KYNING unexpectedly against DEPTFORT's lance, wrenching it from that man's hands, wedging it in KYNING's plastic armour, and burying its tip in his chest. The spectators roared their approval; for them it was simply part of the show. But the hot wetness spurting from KYNING's chest was not synthetic dye.

When he regained consciousness it was to find himself a patient in an Elvan hospital. And all too quickly he discovered he had been abandoned by DEPTFORT, without either passage money to follow or his back pay. He'd been dumped. He had nothing but his clothing, a box of books, his silver-hilted dagger—a genuine relic—and an almost-

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full bottle of Kalvaran pulque.

Elva was a "perfect" planet. Set up by the Forefathers to become a utopia of civilized human behavior, it had limited commerce with other worlds; it was a "perfect" self-contained, static society. And KYNING was marooned on it.

ADSTRATOR GORMAN told him that as a matter of routine they had checked his credentials through the nearest Davinian outpost, and they had no record of KYNING—his passport was a forgery. And, since the Davinians confiscated the passport, KYNING is now stuck on-planet, unable to leave.

GORMAN suggests he fit himself into Elvan society, and, for want of anything better to do, KYNING agrees. He is assigned to be the new roommate of CHAI RIKER, tested, and put into training for a job in electronics.

All too quickly he discovers the reason for the static tranquility of Elva. Everyone drinks aqapa, a drink which contains emotion-dulling drugs. And to reinforce this, the TV broadcasts fed into Elvan homes contain subliminal messages which encourage the consumption of aqapa.

He informs the innocent RIKER of this, and soon finds himself with a new protege: RIKER is stunned to realize that he has been living a drugged life, and wants to stop. In an effort to help him—partly because he is bored with Elvan life, partly because of his own vestigial idealism—KYNING introduces RIKER successively to his own interests: books about the ancient rites of chivalry, the alcoholic Kalvaran, and, finally, mock fencing with improvised plastic swords in an unused subcellar.

He also meets RIKER's friends: a group of six men and three women who met after the weekly concerts (second-rate music by second-rate musicians) at the apartment of CLEB. The others include FRAK, CINDY, JANNETH, and a strangely quiet girl named NEFFA DEEGNEY. KYNING is attracted to NEFFA, but refuses to call her by that name; instead he christens her DULCINEA.

Only gradually does KYNING become aware of the fact that he has introduced a subversive element into the "perfect" Elvan society. Having meddled with RIKER's life to the extent of introducing him to new and strangely violent emotions—the first time they fought with swords was a remarkable catharsis for the gentle Elvan—he now finds RIKER spreading the seed of dissent outward among his friends, many of whom he has succeeded in weaning from aqapa. RIKER works in customs—a make-work job, actually, like most Elvan jobs—and makes contacts with off-world spacers to smuggle in more books and Kalvaran. Having taken an interest in his world for the first time, RIKER is swept with great enthusiasms. He creates a literary group among his friends and shares with them KYNING's chivalric books and their romantic vision.

KYNING's interest, however, lies with DULCINEA. The girl is quiet, reserved, but still questioning. And she is a total innocent. That appeals to KYNING in an odd way he cannot fully understand. His cynicism crumbles when he is with her, and he tries to share with her his great romantic dreams for worlds that never were nor ever will be. And, ultimately, he kisses her.

She does not respond; there was no communication in the touch of their lips; the act was unknown and all but meaningless to her.

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CHAPTER 7

RIKER'S LITERARY GROUP not only did well but it grew. It expanded rapidly, then lost a few of the less determined, settling eventually to fourteen sincere acolytes—twelve men and the two girls, Janneth and Dulcinea.

Riker, too, was doing well. His fencing lessons progressed from simple exercises into actual contests with a speed that dazed Kyning. As the opponent, he found himself dredging up skills that had lain dormant through the choreographed swordplay of the Pageant. And it was fun.

To his surprise, he also found his frequent evening strolls with Dulcinea oddly satisfying. There was only the walking and the talking—nothing more. But he'd discovered a respect for her exotic naivete and a delight in the wonderful, almost mystical creature she was.

There were times when he'd left her, unkissed, at her door and gone back to his own room silently cursing his frustration. But far more often the warmth of her company lingered and he slept content.

His sojourn on Elva had acquired form now. The literary classes, the fencing lessons, and especially Dulcinea's company, relieved the monotony of his studies in electronics. And there was always the quiet personal pleasure of contemplating revenge against Deptfort. For a time that had been a primary escape from boredom. But more and more now, he found himself filling the long dull moments with thoughts of Dulcinea.

Riker interrupted his contemplation one evening by rushing into the room with his eyes shining and his breath ragged with excitement. Stammering almost unintelligibly, he led Kyning down to the subcellar and waved his hands at a crate that sat open in the middle of the floor.

Dropping to one knee beside the long slender box, Kyning dug into the foam packing. It had already been disturbed. Under the first layer, he found four fresh bottles of Kalvaran.

He looked up at Riker's beaming face and asked, "This is the stuff you ordered from the smuggler?"

"Yes!"

He dug deeper. There were books—at least a couple of dozen cubes and a new scanner. He glanced over the titles, impressed and pleased. Most were fiction, the rest histories and biographies.

"Go on! See what else there is!" Riker urged.

He stirred aside more of the foam. And drew out a sheathed sword.

"Bedamned!" he muttered, astonished. A quote from Tennyson leaped into his mind as he gazed at the weapon. It *twinkled with diamond sparks, Myriads of topaz-lights and jacinth-work of subtlest jewellery* . . .but *subtle* was the wrong word. There was no subtlety in this pseudo-antique. It imitated no specific design but was the product of some modern craftsman who'd interpreted baroque ornamentation in a wild array of synthetic stones and pantograph engraving. A gaudy, almost garish interpretation.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Riker grinned.

"Excalibur," Kyning answered, setting it into Riker's outstretched hand.

As he took it, Riker said, "I'm sorry I couldn't afford to get them both like that."

"Both?" Kyning reached deeper into the packing. The second sword was far simpler, not a work of jewellery but a fine reproduction of some actual antique. The sheath was black pseudo-leather overlaid

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with a crude filigree of mock silver. The hilt was a functional Saxon-style cruciform.

He wrapped his hand around it respectfully. As he slowly withdrew it from the sheath he could feel the rightness of its fit in his palm and its balanced weight. More than merely an imitation, this was a work of art made for a connoisseur's collection, he thought. He wondered if Riker might not have been mistaken about which was the more expensive of the two weapons. Holding it, he realized what crude and awkward things the practice blades the two of them had fashioned were.

"Bedamned," he mumbled again. Riker would have the gaudy bauble. *This* was a weapon to suit his own tastes. One he'd like to take with him when he left Elva.

Riker was swinging the wide, tooled and jewel-bedecked belt of Excalibur around his waist. He settled the sheath against his thigh and posed proudly.

"Must have cost you a bloody fortune," Kyning said.

Riker looked a little embarrassed as he admitted, "I sold a part of my haga mark collection. Just some duplicates and things. But it's worth it, don't you think?"

Kyning nodded sincerely.

Sliding out of the pose, Riker looked at his own hands and then at the sword Kyning was holding. Tentatively, as if it were a suggestion of some kind, he muttered, "It'd be a shame to keep them to ourselves, wouldn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"The lessons have been going so well. I feel like I really know what I'm doing now. Kyn, couldn't we put on a pageant?"

"What!"

"Just a little one. We could hold it down here. We could have the literary group for an audience and we could fence for them. They'd love it, Kyn. I know they would!"

"What the hell . . ." Kyning mumbled with a shrug. "Why not?"

It sounded simple enough to begin with. He figured it would be a mock-duel differing from the practice sessions only in that they'd have spectators. But the plans grew.

Riker commissioned Janneth to make him a costume. Then he proceeded to decorate the cellar with odds and ends. He cut cloth and painted it himself, after visuals in the books of chivalry. He lined the walls with arras and pennons. Kyning cooperated, laying out rough sketches of heraldic emblems for him and fabricating lamps and torches to provide genuine firelight.

Janneth ran into problems with the costume. Needlecraft was her hobby, but it consisted mostly of embroidering samplers. She'd never hand-fashioned clothing before. She and Riker had to spend hours together working on the fit of it. But the final results were more than adequate.

Pure Hollywood, Kyning thought with admiration as he watched Riker preen before the mirror in the costume. Like the older Hollywood audio-visual interpretations of the chivalric legends, it was a melding of ancient and contemporary elements—an extrapolation from the illustrations in the books into a lavish spectacle.

Trunks, hose and tunic were white in imitation of the hero of Deptfort's Historical Pageant. Smuggled fabric of purple and gold lame had been made into a petit-cote and used for trim on a great cloak. Masses of jewellery had been fashioned from plastics and metallic foil.

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Even a slim coronet had been shaped to encircle Riker's brow.

Kyning speculated that even the Henry that Holbein had portrayed had probably never been so resplendently or garishly arrayed. Or prouder in posture.

Admiring his image, Riker alternated self-praise with discontented mumblings about his lack of mailed armour. He took some solace, though, in Kyning's assurances that even lightweight plastic armour would have been one hell of a hindrance until he'd gotten accustomed to its bulk and inflexibility.

Kyning managed to find sardonic amusement in the cockstrutting, but with all the gaudy props the proposed exhibition was coming to remind him too much of Deptfort's Pageant. He found himself growing moody, and as the day set for the show approached, he began to dread it.

The stage was set and the audience had been seated on scattered cushions in the dimlit practice chamber. Like Riker, Kyning waited behind one of the mock-tapestries, ready to make a grand entrance. Dressed in his old black costume, he felt too damned much like he was back in the Pageant awaiting his cue.

Riker had demonstrated a good instinct for the dramatic. He'd even worked out a bit of dialogue for a challenge to precede the mock battle. Taking the stage first, he posed to be admired in his finery, then made a short but flowery speech of self-introduction—in rhyme.

On cue, Kyning strode onstage and confronted the Hero with the opening insult. Riker's stage-presence wasn't quite as good as his dramatic sense. He flubbed his next line. But after a strained, red-faced moment, he recovered and proceeded.

Kyning had a feeling that his own reading was dull and lifeless. When he drew the fine replica of a Saxon sword, it seemed unnaturally heavy in his hand. His arm moved clumsily and his wrist felt stiff. This wasn't stage fright. He was certain of that. But some sense of depression hung over him like a leaden mist, interfering with his every move. He cursed himself for bad thrusts and sloppy footwork. His skill seemed to have deserted him. His face grew damp and his hair began to soak with sweat. His hand became slippery against the handle of the sword. His breathing grew ragged and he fought with inexcusable awkwardness.

Riker's first moments of fluster passed quickly once the duel had begun. Caught up in the familiar joy of fencing, and encouraged by the applause of his audience, he was at his best.

Soon Kyning found himself hard-pressed. And in the end, defeated. And this was no feigned defeat that was a part of the actor's craft, but outright failure against a sword better-handled.

It was done. Riker bowed stiffly in imitation of the performers in Deptfort's Pageant as the spectators cheered him. And Kyning walked wearily out of the arena of their attention, hoping he went unnoticed.

He paused near the doorway to wipe at the lank hair that hung over his forehead, plastered there with sweat. His sword arm felt heavy, its muscles weak.

He had believed himself no longer capable of knowing this particular humiliation. He'd thought he had stopped taking enough pride in his fighting skill to be ashamed of performing badly. After all, the black knight was always defeated—always dragged off the field in dishonor. He'd thought he was used to losing.

But this time he had walked off the

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field of battle knowing that this ending hadn't been scripted in advance. This time it was *he* who had failed. The maestro was outplayed by his pupil, undone because he'd put up a damned poor show. Riker was a good swordsman now, but hardly his superior—not unless the skill he'd once possessed had died along with his dreams.

He felt her presence an instant before she touched his arm. Shamedly, he faced Dulcinea.

"We could go for a walk," she said. "We can look at the stars."

With a vague sense of relief, he said, "Sure. But I want to get out of this idiotic monkey-suit first."

He returned quickly, wearing the drab coveralls. Riker was still holding court when he and the girl left, hand in hand.

As usual, they drifted toward the field that had served as tiltyard for the Pageant. It had changed since then. Now dark shadows bulked on the ground—loads of building materials heaped like the wreckage of some fallen castle. He led Dulcinea to seat herself on the ramparts of stacked duromer base blocks, then settled at her side.

Overhead icy specks of light confused the night sky. Nothing was familiar to him. No bright hunter led his hounds across the dark plain, no archer drew his bow there. The Seven Sisters huddled together somewhere else. The Great Bear lumbered with his little brother across some far distant sky.

No, this was not Earth but some alien world cupped by a stark and strange sky. This was not home. *But what world was,* he asked himself.

He searched for some bit of conversation to break the silence. But it was Dulcinea who spoke first.

"Is it terribly important?" she asked.

"What?"

"Losing the sword fight?"

"Hell no! I'm used to it," he said. But in his own ears it sounded too strong—too much like a lie.

"Why were you in the Historical Pageant?" she asked.

He grunted, "Because it was there."

"No. I mean—why were you a knight?"

"It's my trade."

"But *why*?"

"Destiny, M'lady. I was born to it."

"Please tell me, Kyn."

He glanced toward the lights of the spaceport, thinking that they didn't actually look much like faery lamps on enchanted battlements. Softly, with sincerity, he said, "I guess I really was born to it."

"Tell me."

"I'll tell thee everything I can; There's little to relate . . ." He quoted as he hunted words. He found a way to begin.

"Once upon a time in a faraway land that some people call Earth and others call by names I wouldn't care to repeat, there was a student who had even more than his fair share of the idiocy that's inherent in all students. He was enamoured of the legends of chivalry and other foolish fantasies. But he wasn't satisfied just to read about them. He wanted to find their essence in the real world. Unfortunately, he was a fairly good student and knew his field. When the chance came along to wear a sword and play at jousting and travel the universe in the guise of a knight-errant, he took the job."

After a moment, she said, "That's not all."

"No," he muttered, "That's not all."

Her hand was in his. Her fingers tightened as she asked, "Please, Kyn."

He wondered why it could be this

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important to her. It was all dead past now—all gone to ashes and dust. And he wondered too why he couldn't shape the pronoun *I* as he told it.

"Okay," he said. "In those days, in that time, there was a show called the Historical Pageant of Chivalry. It wasn't the same thing as the show you saw, and Deptfort didn't own it. He was just the actor-manager. It was really a fine thing—a class outfit—and it only played the major planets of the Earth Empire. It made a regular circuit and it came to the town where the main branch of the University of Humanities is located several times a year. The student had been born and raised in that town and he'd seen the Pageant every time it came. He began to go to every performance when it was in town and after a while he got to know some of the people who were with the show. He was particularly impressed with the stories of their travels that Deptfort told him. And it was natural he'd eventually find out about the line of business Deptfort began operating on the side."

"What was that?" she asked.

"A trade in some drugs that are very illegal in the Earth Empire. Deptfort was smuggling them and pushing them among the students. Our Hero learned about that and, being the son of the Chief Dean of the University, he also learned that the drug trade had been discovered. The authorities had no proof, but they had suspicions and they intended to get the evidence they needed by a surprise raid on the Pageant."

He stopped talking and, after a moment, she asked, "What happened then?"

"The student cried the alarm, and Deptfort ran. He packed up the Pageant and got away. The student went with him. After that the show didn't dare go back into Earth's jurisdiction, so the man who'd owned it sold what was left of it to Deptfort.

"In some ways, he's a good showman," he continued. "But in some ways he's damned third-rate. He's been letting the show disintegrate. He drags it around from one backwater planet to another, wherever he can get a booking or permission to play on commission, and he keeps on peddling drugs, never really turning a profit with either. He has to stick to the outlying independent planets like Elva where there's not enough organized law to catch up with him. It's turned into a third-rate junk show . . ."

"And the student?"

". . . is an imitation knight."

"But you *like* being a knight?" she asked.

"No."

"Then why did you stay with the Pageant?"

He thought about that. It was a question he'd asked himself more than a few times. Finally, he said, "I'm a liar."

"You mean what you've told me isn't true?"

"No, not that. But I lie to myself. I delude myself that I'm a cold-blooded realist, but I'm not. I'm still a damnfool dreamer. I hated the show, but I loved it too. There was a kick in it—in pounding that pseudo-horse down the list with a spear under my arm—in swinging a sword and hearing the clang of the sounding plate—in riding out with a plume on my helmet and a buckler on my arm. So I'm the black knight and I die in the end, but still there's a kick in it."

She smiled at him as if she understood. But he thought that she couldn't. Words only hinted around the edges. They didn't actually explain. Nothing could really

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explain it. It was completely irrational—some acute form of insanity.

Dulcinea spoke suddenly, startling him from his thoughts.

"Is Earth such a terrible place?" she asked.

"Huh? What makes you think that?"

"It must have been a terrible place to make you want to run away from it."

"Run away?" But she was right, wasn't she. He *had* run. He'd always run. He asked, "You know what a child prodigy is?"

"Yes."

"Well, a child prodigy doesn't always grow into an adult genius. Sometimes he just happens to be way ahead for his age, and eventually the years catch up with him. Say, for six or seven years he's something special—a jewel in the crown of his parents. His life is a continual string of praise and shows of their pride. Then he begins to find it's not as easy as it was before."

When he paused this time, she waited unspeaking, and in a moment, he went on: "At first he's top student in an advanced class with no effort at all. But then he finds it's beginning to take work—before long a lot of hard work. Even that's not enough though and by the time he's ten or eleven, he's not at the head of the class any more. And he's running a damned Red Queen's race just to stay with the advanced group. There's no more praise now—no more of that open show of parental pride. He doesn't understand. The only thing that seems certain to him is that they're disappointed with him. Nothing he can do now seems adequate to win back their affection. At eleven he's a goddamned failure. So he begins to run away."

"Couldn't his parents understand?"

"I don't know. I don't know if they even tried. As Chief Dean of the foremost University in the Earth Empire, his father is almost completely involved in his work. And being the Dean's wife is a full-time job for his mother. Before—when his father was only Secondary Dean and the boy was a savant in literature it was different. His father noticed him then. But later . . . later . . . the kid runs away."

"Where does he run?"

"Dreams. All his life this kid's been surrounded by ancient literature. From the time he learned to operate a scanner he's had access to his father's library and its collection of movies."

"Movies?"

"An early form of audio-visual entertainment," he explained. "They were developed in the twentieth century and in that era they were rich with fantasy—DeMille, Disney, Stewart, Nibutani—all making great spectacles of derring-do, of honor and chivalry and of Good triumphing over Evil. That was a favorite theme. In the movies even more than books, a guy who tried hard enough and meant well enough eventually won, no matter what he was up against. That was a dream for a kid to believe in—a world for him to hide in. He could even delude himself with the trappings of chivalric fantasy by studying fencing and horsemanship and by being awed at a Historical Pageant. The dreams became all he knew. He never found out much about the *real* world. Not then."

"But later?"

"Later, with Deptfort for a teacher, he learned quickly enough," he mumbled.

It was quiet—so quiet that he could hear the soft rustling of her clothing as she breathed. The weight of the silence was stifling. What was she thinking, he

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wondered.

Something moved in the sky. He glimpsed the flash of light from the corner of his eye. It was probably only a distant ship shifting vectors, but it had looked like a shooting star.

"Go and catch a falling star," he said aloud. *"Get with child a mandrake root . . ."*

"What's that?" she asked.

"An ancient poem."

"Is there more?"

"Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind."

He stopped there, not wanting to quote any more of it to her. The next lines were about the faithlessness of woman.

After a moment, she said, "Kyn, do you remember that strange thing you did when we went walking for the first time? You put your mouth on mine somehow."

He nodded slightly.

"Will you do it again?"

It was hard to see her expression by the pale starlight. He could make nothing of the pattern of shadows and highlights that lined her face. His hands were hesitant.

"Please," she said.

With chill, uncertain fingers, he touched her face as he bent his mouth to hers.

There was warmth in her lips against his. And then, to his surprise, there was a slow seeking. Cautiously, like a frightened thing, the tip of her tongue explored. There was response.

It came slowly, distantly, but it came to her. When his hands moved from her face to close around her body, he could feel it in her. Then—suddenly—she was drawing away from him.

"It's so strange," she said wonderingly.

"Is that all—just *strange*?"

She looked at him, her face coldly shadowed ivory in that dim light. "I don't understand, Kyn. I've never felt like this before."

"There's *one* miracle man can really work," he said. His fingertips touched her—but she jerked away again.

"Please, Kyn, no!"

She sounded frightened. And he didn't want to scare her. It was damned important not to—overwhelmingly important. He pulled back his hands and rested them across his knees.

There was a small scar across the knuckles of one hand. It was old and faded. He rarely noticed it, but now in the starlight it seemed oddly prominent. Not even a scar of battle, he found himself thinking. Just a mark he'd picked up from a set of gear teeth once when a wrench slipped. A badge of honor as false as the knight himself.

Strange. She'd chosen the right word—he felt damned strange himself.

"Will you take me home now?" Her voice was very small, as if muffled by the night.

He nodded and got to his feet. She took his hand, clinging tightly to it as they walked silently back into the city.

He left her at the door to her building. When it had closed behind her, cutting her from his sight, he jammed his hands down into his pockets and started back toward Riker's, feeling detached from reality and lost to dreams—brooding about a world and a life that persisted in taking some sudden sharp turning just when he thought he had it figured.

He was deep in his own thoughts when he got back to the room. Riker was there,

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still dressed in the gaudy white costume, still exuding enthusiasm.

With an eager impatience, he announced, "Kyn, I want to start a new class."

Only vaguely attentive, Kyning mumbled, "More literature?"

"Swords!"

"Huh?"

"I want to start fencing classes for the others," Riker answered. "A lot of them want to try it. They loved the show we put on and they want to learn it themselves. It won't be much work, Kyn. I can help with the teaching. I understand the problems."

"Is this *their* idea or *yours*?"

The question deflated him only slightly. "Well, they all loved the idea. They would have proposed it, if they'd thought of it first. Please, Kyn. It won't be much trouble."

"Sure. What the hell. Go ahead," Kyning muttered, not much caring. If Riker wanted to expand his games to include his friends that was his concern.

"I understand their problems," Riker repeated, as if he were thinking aloud. "They're Elvans and *I* understand their problems. *I* can help them." He stepped up to the mirror and gazed at his image in it, smiling proudly.

CHAPTER 8

A BOOK OF VERSES underneath the Bough, a Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness . . .

Kyning was sprawled among the cushions on the practice chamber floor, nibbling at a piece of odd Elvan pastry. The bottle of Kalvaran at his elbow was half-empty, but Riker claimed to have ordered more. He'd gotten a bit secretive about the contacts he'd developed, but it looked to Kyning as if there were several now. There'd been shipments of books coming in at frequent intervals.

Right now Riker was working with the class of aspiring swordsmen—the twelve male members of the literary group. But Kyning paid no attention. He had an activated scanner in front of him, but he was thinking of Dulcinea. She had continued to go walking with him as if nothing unusual had happened. But it wasn't the same—not for him—not since that kiss she had asked for. She *would* ask again, he thought. She would if he didn't rush her or somehow frighten her away.

He forced his eyes and thoughts back to the scanner. Some of the new books Riker'd gotten were intriguing. The library had expanded to include a wide assortment of ancient literature, with an emphasis on biography as well as chivalry. Riker'd avidly read the lives of several Caesars, the original Alexander and his recent namesake, a wide assortment of second millenium dictators and sundry masters of financial empires. This book Kyning was reading now was a detailed history of the Castor Dynasty—the family that had held complete power over the entire planet of Jedna for over two centuries. It had been written just a few months before the revolution that overthrew the Castors, and the author was most sympathetic toward the family, portraying the first Castor—the one since nicknamed HeavyHeel—as a Messiah of sorts. The whole family was described as benevolent and idealistic, misunderstood and misused by outworlders.

A house historian, Kyning had decided.

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The book was a barrel of laughs. He was grinning at a particularly florid passage when Riker's voice suddenly intruded itself into his awareness.

"Ten Thousand Devils! Dammit, Tede, what do you think you've got hold of—a bull prod?" Riker was screeching at one shy and inept student.

Kyning glanced up. Tede was clinging to the practice sword as if it were a long straw on the crest of a flood tide. He cringed before his instructor, apparently incapable of voicing any kind of reply as Riker lashed a string of harsh epithets at him.

"Hold on," Kyning called. "Take it easy. What's the matter?"

"This *fool*—this *dolt*—this *maggotpie* jackanapes!" Riker squealed. "This lead-witted dullard thinks he's flailing chaff!"

Almost inaudibly, Tede mumbled, "What's chaff?"

Riker paid no attention, but proceeded with his berating, and Kyning could see that the pupil was brow-beaten into such cowering nervousness that he couldn't possibly do well now.

Propping himself on his elbows, he said with a patient calm that he hoped would convey itself to Riker, "Let's see what he's doing wrong."

"Show him!" Riker snapped.

Trembling, Tede went through a slow and clumsy feint at the popinjay. Kyning watched critically, then said, "It doesn't look so bad to me. Not for an apprentice."

Tede grinned with self-conscious gratitude.

"Doesn't look bad!" Riker groaned. He strode toward Kyning, a grim two-legged quarrel intent on its target. Assuming a stance with his feet apart and his knuckles planted on his hips, he gazed down at his new adversary and repeated with mock incredulity, *"Doesn't look bad!"*

Kyning hadn't bothered to get to his feet. He looked up at Riker, towering over him red-faced and seething. Maintaining the tone of quiet calm, he said, "You're turning into a ruddy Prussian of a fencing-master, aren't you?"

"Damn!" Riker spat between his teeth. He seemed as if he wanted to swing out and thwack hell out of something—completely frustrated now by a foe who wouldn't stand to face him.

"Damn you, Kyning! You *talk* about fencing. That's all you do—*talk*. You leave the whole burden of this class on my shoulders and then, when I *try* to make swordsmen out of these clowns, you loll about criticizing!"

Kyning shrugged. Sure, he'd left the class pretty much in Riker's hands. It had seemed as if Riker preferred it that way—really enjoyed the opportunity to strut and prance in front of the students in that gaudy white costume like a dunhill cock.

"You want me to take over for a while?" he asked, sitting up.

"Forget it!" Riker snapped at him. "Don't trouble yourself."

"Look, I'll be glad to help. I . . ."

"Forget it!"

"The hell. Do you want my help or don't you?"

"No, I don't! Dammit, I can handle this myself. I don't want you butting in."

Kyning got slowly to his feet. "What's bugging you? It's not just the classes, is it?"

Riker looked as if he were precariously balanced on the edge of giving an answer. But instead, he grunted, "Why the devil don't you go somewhere else to do your loafing? I don't need you around nosing in on what I'm doing!"

Kyning shrugged again. Picking up the

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scanner, he turned and walked away. This might be a natural course of things, he thought as he headed up to the room. After all, until recently Riker hadn't been aware of possessing emotions like anger. Now that he'd discovered a temper hidden under those layers of inhibitions he'd been peeling away, it might be perfectly normal for him to go through a period of overusing it. If that was so, the phase of irritability should wear itself out and pass away before long.

In the room, he picked up the street clothes Riker had tossed onto the couch, and flung them onto the Elvan's still-open bed. For a moment, he stood looking around. Yes, Riker'd changed alright. The room was no longer neat to the point of barrenness. Now it was not only lived-in but downright sloppy. A real mess. He considered straightening up a bit, but decided it wasn't worth the bother. Instead, he dropped onto the couch and stretched out with his hands under his head.

In a way that outburst of Riker's reminded him of Deptfort. Both of them were too damned quick-triggered. But Riker's new-found temper was roughedged and crude. Deptfort had always been slick, even in anger. His self-expression ran more to fine-honed sarcasm of the kind that cut deep—hard to bear and hard to fight.

He wondered where Deptfort and the Pageant might be now. And who was keeping the broken-down horses in operating condition? Nobody else in the company'd had his knack for coping with sick machinery. Maybe one of the things would collapse under the white knight in mid-performance one of these days. He smiled at that idea. Even if it failed to do Deptfort bodily injury, it would still put a deep dent in his pride.

For a while he amused himself by speculating on the various disasters that might strike Deptfort. Then he turned his attention back to the story of the Castor Dynasty. There'd been a strong streak of Deptfort in that family's behavior, too.

When he finally finished the monstrous volume, Riker still hadn't come upstairs. The class would have been over long since, he thought. Maybe Riker was sulking down there in the basement. Well, to hell with him.

He started reading another of the new books—a novel this time. It was a pleasant diversion, a fantasy filled with swords and force-fields. He found himself through it and still Riker wasn't back. Now he was beginning to worry a bit. He felt sure he'd have been called if there had been an accident in class. What could be keeping Riker? Surely, he wouldn't have gone out anywhere in that outre costume.

He put down the scanner, got to his feet and stretched. The open bottle of Kalvaran was still down there. Could Riker have gotten himself stoned, he wondered as he went to the kitchen and opened a fresh bottle. It was a possibility.

He took a long drink, put back the bottle and walked almost reluctantly toward the door. If Riker was stoned, he might need a nursemaid to tend his drunken carcass—or a whipping boy to take his temper out on.

The chamber door was closed. He listened, but could hear no sounds through it, so he shoved it open. The room was completely dark. Automatically, he reached for the wall switch, but jerked back his hand before it came close enough to sensitize the switch panel. That faint murmur he'd heard was snoring.

No point in startling Riker awake or half-blinding him with the sudden glare of the overhead lamp, he thought. He

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could remember the after-effects of his own early Kalvaran jags.

Quietly he opened the door a little wider, letting reflected light from the passageway spill into the chamber. He could make out the shadowy bulk of a figure wrapped in a blanket nested in the cluster of cushions. Should he drag Riker back upstairs, he wondered, or let him sleep it off here?

And then he realized that there was more than one form wrapped in that blanket.

Astonished, he stared, trying to recognize the head that rested against Riker's shoulder. The barely-protruding wisps of hair seemed dark brown.

Janneth? It seemed most probable. Then she stirred enough for him to glimpse her face and confirm his guess.

Grinning to himself, he drew back and gently closed the door. This sure as hell wasn't a time to wake Riker. As he went back up the stairs, he wondered how he could discreetly get answers to the questions that had begun buzzing in his head. This was a development he *should* have anticipated. After all, he'd pretty much told Riker to give it a try. But still it came as a jolting surprise.

Several hours passed before Riker finally drifted in looking rumpled, weary and contentedly dazed. Kyning had given up the vigil and sacked, but his sleep was shallow and Riker's entrance woke him. To be sure Riker knew he was awake and available to be talked at, he called out, "That you?"

Riker answered with a vague grunt and switched on the light, but said nothing. He wandered across the room to the open wall-kitchen and began absently to mix up a cup of coffee. He seemed completely unaware of Kyning's curious gaze.

With a yawn, Kyning sat up and said, "Make me one?"

"Huh?"

"Make a coffee for me, too?"

Riker nodded and pulled down another cup. Wordlessly he fixed the coffee and handed it to him. Then he drifted over to his own bed as if wafted there by some vagrant breeze, and sat down. That was it. He just sat there staring into the distance.

Kyning sipped at his coffee, watching him over the rim of the cup. With a mental shrug, he told himself it looked like he'd just have to wait Riker out. The man seemed to be in a trance.

He tried to remember how he'd felt the first time. There was just one word to describe that experience—*rotten.*

The memory was vivid. He'd had all the build-up of romantic novels and locker-room talk. He'd gone at it overwhelmed with inhibitions and uncertainties, but still with exalted expectations. And he'd left with the feeling that he'd flubbed the whole affair. It had taken him weeks to get over the lingering sense of depression—and far more time before he worked up nerve enough to try again.

Riker's first attempt had apparently been a damnsite more successful. Whatever thought-world of his own Riker was lost in now, his expression suggested bright mists of delightful memories.

The immobile silence persisted so long that Kyning was on the verge of lying down and going back to sleep. Then—finally—Riker spoke.

"Kyn, is that you?"

"Yeah."

There was another span of elliptic silence. And Kyning was about to give up again when Riker suddenly stood up.

His face aglow, his eyes feverish with excitement, he turned toward Kyning and

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announced, "I've *done* something! I've discovered something!"

"Yeah," Kyning muttered. He couldn't quite suppress his grin.

"A miracle!" Riker raved, wildly animated now. "A vision—a dream—a wonder! No! There aren't any words for it, Kyn. I've transcended human experience."

Again, Kyning said, "Yeah."

"You can't imagine what it was like. You can't . . ." Riker sputtered out, at a loss for words.

"I've got a pretty good idea."

Startled, he stammered, "You—you know what I mean?"

"Girls?"

"Yeah!"

Kyning nodded, fascinated by the self-conscious grin that spread over Riker's face. It seemed the epitome of exultation and idiocy intermixed.

"What a fool I've been," Riker moaned. "What a damned lot of fools we all are on Elva! All these years I could have . . . I didn't . . . I never knew . . . years I've wasted in ignorance. *Oh, what a heaven is love!*"

"Oh, what a hell," Kyning muttered in completion of the quotation.

Riker didn't seem to hear. With a grand gesture, he went on, "All those poor damned idiots out *there!* They don't know. They're blind—they're ignorant! Kyn, they're not even *alive!*"

He finally took a drink of his own coffee. It must have been cold by now, Kyning thought, but Riker didn't seem to notice. He gulped at it and then continued.

"You have removed the scales of ignorance from my eyes, Kyn. I'm grateful to you for it. I owe you everything. I owe you my *life.* I was never alive before!"

The accolade was a bit embarassing. Kyning decided to shift the subject over without changing it completely. He asked, "How did *she* feel about it?"

Riker shrugged. But as he gave it a moment of thought his grin faded. Hesitantly, he said, "She's strange."

Had this first venture into paradise been less than perfect? Kyning wondered. He asked, "How?"

"She cried." Riker looked puzzled as he said it.

"That's not so unusual," Kyning assured him.

But he was still frowning with uncertainty. "I never saw a woman cry before. Do you think I hurt her?"

"Was she angry? Did she say anything about never wanting to see you again?"

"No . . . I don't think so."

"Don't worry then. Everything's all right. She'll come back."

Riker sighed with reaffirmed happiness. He seated himself again, leaning back against the headboard of the bed. Relaxed and smiling, his gaze turned inward.

With his curiosity satisfied for the time being, Kyning stretched out, intending to go back to sleep. But then Riker started talking again, almost to himself but aloud.

"I don't understand. Not at all," he said.

"You and Janneth?" Kyning asked. He felt a vague obligation to serve as a receptor for Riker's musings.

"No. I mean I don't understand us Elvans. We learn about biology in school, but nobody ever said anything about this. They *must* know. The mature Elvans who are married and have children—*they* must know. My parents must have known. But nobody ever said anything."

"No rumors? No latrine gossip at all?"

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"No."

Kyning couldn't quite believe that. Not unless . . .

"The aqapa?" he muttered.

"Huh?"

He gazed thoughtfully toward Riker as the idea shaped itself in his mind. "It *could* be the aqapa," he suggested. The stuff dulls your senses. Maybe when you've been saturated in it all your life, you don't really feel the experience. It could be that nobody on Elva talks about sex because nobody really knows. They may all be too thoroughly drugged and inhibited to fully feel it."

"If that's true . . .!" Riker's expression was starkly horror-stricken. "Kyn, we've got to tell them!"

"Sure," Kyning grunted.

"I mean it! They're slaves of their own ignorance. They're not alive. Somebody's got to tell them, Kyn!"

Kyning's mouth twisted with the cynical grin that he tried not to show. "Carry the word to your benighted brethren if you want. Succeed and they'll build monuments to you in every public square on the planet."

Riker caught the doubting tone. He insisted, "I mean it!"

"Go ahead, evangelize all you want to," Kyning said with a shrug. "You'll probably get a little cult of converts, like your literature and fencing classes, but remember that this population's on aqapa and most of them aren't going to believe you or to give it up willingly. This planet's static. I don't think your society has changed in centuries. I don't think your people are capable of accepting a new idea . . ."

"You're wrong about that," Riker interrupted. "We import all the latest technological developments. Everybody's got sonirad plumbing now."

"That's not the kind of change I mean. Sure, you pick up superficial household improvements, but do they affect the overall pattern? I'm talking about *ideas.* Has anybody on Elva ever had one? Has anything been invented or any technological advance been developed *on Elva* in the past couple of centuries?"

Riker considered the question and finally admitted, "No . . . I don't think so."

"The way I see it, your people have channelled their minds into such rigidly-defined courses, and dulled them so with drugs that they *can't* generate new ideas. I believe they can't even handle the ones that originate outside. You import all your culture—your music and your art—and it's only second-rate stuff you bring in at that. You're not exposed to ideas." Kyning's voice was growing intense as he spoke. "Your population is statistically-controlled and you don't allow immigration or emigration offplanet. Your lives are planned for you according to computer-projections. You're told what jobs to train for . . ."

"According to our aptitudes."

"Yeah, except that you're put into the pre-existing slots that you fit the best. You're *forced* into them, though. They don't flex to fit you. You're produced on a stamping machine. The master computer charts the patterns for your thoughts and emotions to follow and you're cut out to fit the pattern. Always the same pattern, generation after generation. Culturally, you're probably identical with your ancestors of centuries ago."

"The Forefathers were good people. They programmed the computers to make this the best of all possible worlds," Riker said. It was obviously the credo he'd been taught all his life. But his voice lacked conviction.

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"Pangloss!" Kyning snapped. "Dammit, man, maybe they meant well but they've goofed it. You're repressed and drugged until you're hardly human at all. So maybe *you*—personally—have managed to break free. And maybe some of that gang you're teaching will succeed. But that's not a whole society. You go on out and preach your Good News and see what it gets you. Just keep a first-aid kit of Kalvaran handy because you'll be crawling back with your psyche bashed in."

Riker stared at him, looking awed by what he'd said and apparently surprised by his vehemence.

Kyning was surprised himself. He wondered how he'd gotten that wound up. Hell, he had given up dreams of improving the universe—or even any small part of it—long since. That was an illusion for the damnfool dreamers to theorize about.

"You're wrong," Riker said softly. "I know you're wrong. Elva *can* be helped. I can help my people."

"Go ahead," Kyning muttered. He'd given fair warning. What Riker did now was his own responsibility. Let him find out about reality the hard way.

During the days that followed, Riker presided over swordsmanship classes only half-attentive to his pupils. They welcomed the change from his former outbursts of temper. Several nights he disappeared—into the subcellar, Kyning supposed. And he spent much of the daytime wandering rapt in his own thoughts or deep in the study of various books.

Then, one evening while they were eating together, the thoughts seething in him bubbled over. He'd been so deep in contemplation that he was eating as mechanically as an automaton. Kyning had been watching with amusement as the hand raised food, the mouth accepted and chewed at it, and the Adam's apple bobbed with swallowing in a precise habit pattern.

He stopped. As if a cog had snapped or the current had been cut off, he stopped in mid-motion, a forkful of food halfway to his mouth. His eyes fastened on Kyning, focussing now.

"The time has come to talk this out," he announced with magnificent pomposity.

Kyning gazed back at him, straight-faced, and replied, *"The time has come, the Walrus said . . ."*

"Huh?" he grunted, taken aback.

"To talk of many things, of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax—Of cabbages—and kings . . ."

Flustered, he scowled and snapped, "Are you mocking me?"

Kyning picked up a roll and flourished it. *"A loaf of bread, the Walrus said, Is what we chiefly need: Pepper and vinegar besides Are very good indeed."*

Riker's face was blossoming into an impressively intense red. "Ten Thousand Devils, Kyn! Are you interested or aren't you?"

"In what?" Kyning said blankly.

"In what I'm trying to tell you."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"Stop it, damn you! Stop it and listen!" Riker was on his feet now, and almost shouting.

Kyning told himself he'd taken this far enough. Maybe too far. Riker was really serious about whatever it was. Putting down the roll and composing his expression, he said, "Okay, tell me."

For a moment Riker continued to steam silently. Then he seated himself again. It took him a bit longer to

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completely collect himself and begin talking.

"Kyn, I want to help My People."

With effort, Kyning restrained from laughing at the sheer bombast of it. Instead, he asked, "How?"

"Their lives are made *bitter with hard bondage,*" Riker declaimed with broad gestures. "The drugs and the computer system—this way of life *that oppresses is more terrible than tigers. Man is born free and everywhere he is in irons,* chained to the old, unyielding patterns."

Kyning counted the heavily-emphasized quotations to himself: Genesis, or was it Exodus? Then Confucius and Rousseau. Riker's reading had been extensive.

Plunging on avidly, Riker struck a pose and climaxed his speech, *"Who would be free themselves must strike the blow!"*

"Byron's *Child Harold,*" Kyning said, and then threw a quote back at him: *"Freedom exists only in the land of dreams*—Schiller."

"You're mocking me," Riker mumbled. This time there was no anger in his voice. He leaned back limply into his chair, his eyes turning unseeing toward the plate in front of him. Disconsolately, he said, "*You* started it, Kyn. *You* brought the seeds of it to Elva. And now you make fun of it."

The painful sincerity in his voice outweighed all of the fustian that had gone before. Abashed, Kyning dropped his own eyes. "Alright, I'm sorry. I'll listen. *What* did I start?"

Riker's brows bent in thought. He seemed uncertain now about speaking his piece.

Probably wondering whether to cast his pearls before this swine, Kyning thought. He honestly regretted the scornful amusement he'd taken at Riker's expense. He had to acknowledge that his presence had been a cataclysmic influence on the Elvan's life. He owed, at the least, common courtesy.

At last Riker broke his silence. "The *change,* Kyn. You started it."

"What change?" Kyning asked. But he had a feeling he knew what Riker was thinking about.

"The great change in Elvan society. My people need it and I mean to give it to them."

"I thought you understood that," Kyning said with a dull sigh. "Preaching on the streets won't do you any good."

"I don't intend to *preach* it to them. I'm going to *take* it to them," Riker declaimed, his enthusiasm showing again. *"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate . . ."*

"Tell that to the Master Computer."

"I intend to!"

Kyning eyed him with growing apprehension. "You don't mean by force?"

He nodded.

"You know you're talking treason?"

"If this be treason, make the most of it!"

"God gramercy!" Kyning snapped. "Stop quoting at me! Do you have any idea what you're talking about?"

Riker leaned across the table toward him. "There is no such word as *treason* in the common Elvan dialect. It's not there because the Elvans never had any use for it. And we don't need it now! What I propose is not *treason,* Kyn. It's *salvation!*" My people don't understand the word *slavery* either, but that hasn't saved them from it. They are slaves to drugs and computers and their own

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ignorance. I mean to educate them—to liberate them!"

"Whether they want it or not?"

He nodded again.

"Are you planning to conquer Elva by yourself?" Kyning asked, incredulously.

"I intend to raise an *army*." Riker's voice dropped to a half-whisper. "And I'll need a general to head it up. I'll need a man who understands arms and warfare."

"You mean me?"

"Together we can lead Elva to its glory!"

He was crazy, Kyning thought. This was too wild and impossible a dream to be anything but madness. Riker'd addled his wits by reading too many romances.

He asked, "You think you can raise a force of Elvans and arm them to conquer the planet?"

"I've thought it all out, Kyn. It won't take many of us. Elva has nothing even resembling an army now. We don't have weapons onplanet. We don't have any kind of defenses except for the satellite mines above the atmosphere and they're only good against invasion from outside. The people in authority haven't got *any* way to fight an uprising from within. Believe me, Kyn, it will work! I can liberate Elva, and I want you with me. I want you at my right hand, leading my army. Please, Kyn!"

Hell, it was a fantasy too mad to ever come to fruition, Kyning decided. What harm could there be in humoring Riker, in playing along with him until he got over this delusion? It'd be better to stick with him and keep an eye on him than to let him go running off in all directions with his head full of crazy ideas.

"Okay," he said with a sigh.

Riker grinned broadly and held a hand out to him. "You'll never regret this, Kyn. Believe me, you'll never regret it!"

CHAPTER 9

RIKER BEGAN his campaign of liberation by inducting the twelve men of the fencing class into his army, designating them as his lieutenants. And Kyning waited with somewhat apprehensive curiosity to see what would happen when he started trying to recruit a body of enlistees to serve under them, but so far Riker'd confined his activities to this small group.

The response he got from them was astonishing. He made stirring speeches, larded with quotations. The words of Marat, Jefferson, Wen-chung, Salihuya and many other noted patriots—real and fictional—were reshaped to fit his needs and delivered with flair. And his audience reacted with as feverish an enthusiasm as ever the hearers of the source-speakers had.

As general officer, Kyning worked with the twelve, dreaming up drills and exercises to keep them busy and himself amused. Their eager all-out cooperation seemed easy enough to understand: free of the dulling influence of aqapa and aware of the negative qualities of normal Elvan life, they embraced Riker's cause as giving purpose to their existence.

He wondered how long this illusion would last—how soon they'd tire of the game. He'd already begun to weary of it himself the night that Riker rushed into their room looking as if he were on the verge of bursting with excitement.

"Come on downstairs, Kyn! I've got something to show you," he announced.

Resignedly, Kyning set down the book he'd been scanning and followed,

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wondering what he was up to now. Something else wildly fantastic, to judge from the look of him.

There was a packing case waiting in the subcellar. Almost trembling with eagerness, Riker slid back the lid and jerked out a wad of cushioning.

Startled, Kyning dropped to his knees to finger through the contents of the crate. A dozen fine swords, replicas of antiques that had once been functional weapons. He picked up one and drew it from its sheath, feeling the precision of its balance and the fineness of the steel. It would take an edge nicely. They were beautiful weapons. But . . .

"Well, that's the last of my haga mark collection," Riker was saying. The pride in his voice was barely contaminated with regret.

"For the revolution?" Kyning asked.

He nodded, beaming.

"All *edged* weapons? No guns?"

"Sure!"

Kyning looked at him dourly, wondering if even an Elvan could be that naive. Even a fantastic game should be played with some sense of logic. "You expect to take over an entire planet with twelve men carrying points and pricks?"

"It'll be easy," Riker grunted as if he were disappointed in Kyning. "Look at Spartacus in the first century B.C. He went against the whole Roman Empire . . ."

"And he lost."

"Christ conquered half of Earth with twelve apostles and no weapons at all."

"His *words* conquered," Kyning answered. "*He* was crucified."

"What about the Twelve Peers of Charlemagne? He and his twelve paladins were only armed with swords and spears, and they established an empire!" Riker went on. "And there was Huang-Ti just a couple of hundred years ago. He started with a handful of peasants and claimed an empire. His dynasty reigned for over a century!"

"He had an entire discontent populace just waiting for a leader to rise up."

"So do I! As soon as My People stop using aqapa and discover their true inner feelings, they'll all be with me!"

"You have to be in control of the planet *first* in order to break them of the habit," Kyning reminded him.

With a disgusted sigh, Riker answered, "You don't understand at all. We could achieve this revolution without *any* weapons, Kyn. We could do it with our bare hands."

"Or the jawbone of an ass."

Riker ignored the comment. Eyes shining, he continued avidly, "Think about it, Kyn. Stop thinking about offworld precedents and look at *Elva*. What is it we have to do to successfully take control? What is the single most important element in our socio-economic structure?"

"The computer system."

"Right! And what is the key point in it—the one computer that supervises all the rest?"

"The Supervisor—the Master Computer."

"And where is it?"

"In the MCC building," Kyning muttered. He was beginning to see Riker's thought now and it was awesome.

"Yes! It's sitting there in the MCC building right in the middle of the park without so much as a hedge around it. Not a fence, not a single guard—nobody but the people who work in the building to look over it. Nothing but a bunch of dumb, blind sheep. Do you think *they* will offer any resistance? All we have to do is walk in and take over. And when we

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wave these at them . . .!" Riker picked up one of the swords and slashed at air with it.

Sarcastically, Kyning said, "That's all there is to it?"

"Sure!" Riker ran through some phantom, carefully wiped its invisible ichor off the blade and then looked intently at Kyning. "There are *no* weapons of any kind on Elva except *my* swords. Nobody will stand up against us . . ."

"What if somebody tries?"

"We knock him down!" Riker demonstrated, using the pommel of his sword to strike away an imaginery impediment. "He'd be empty-handed, Kyn, and I have twelve trained paladins. Twelve *armed* men."

"Look, the Adstrators may be sheep, but they're not completely dumb and blind. Somebody might put in a call for help from offworld . . ."

Riker shook his head in denial of the possibility. "We march from here to the MCC. We march right over anything or anyone in our way. We walk in and take over. It'll all happen so quickly that they won't know what's hit them until after it's over. Believe me, Kyn, there won't be any resistance. And once we've got the MCC, we will be in control of everything—every production facility on the planet—the food supplies—the communications—*everything!*"

Kyning gazed at him in questioning astonishment. Hell, the way Riker told it, this revolution sounded actually possible. He asked, "And after that?"

"You mean keeping control once we've gotten it? Who's to stop us? Elva's an isolationist world. It doesn't belong to any of the interplanetary mutual defense organizations. Nobody outside has any right to butt into our internal affairs and nobody will. If anyone tries, we've got the satellite mines to keep them away. The mines will be under *our* control, once we've got the MCC."

It could really be as simple as it sounded, Kyning thought incredulously. A bold, decisive coup and the tiny army could conquer a planet. There *should* be a hitch in it, he told himself. But offhand he couldn't think of one.

"It will work," Riker was saying. "I know it will!"

"Maybe," Kyning admitted.

He beamed with pleasure. "I knew you'd agree once you understood. You're my friend, Kyn. The others—they haven't really progressed far enough. They follow orders but they don't really understand me—not the way you do. I want you at my side—not just in the attack but afterward too. It won't be easy. Once we've assumed control, then we'll have the real job ahead of us. We'll have to reorganize the planet and educate the people. That will be a heavy burden on my shoulders, Kyn. I'll need help. I need a confidant on my own level—someone at my right hand to aid me, Kyn. A sort of prime minister."

That was a hell of an idea, Kyning thought sardonically as he pictured himself in the role. He still wasn't completely convinced that the revolution would succeed, or that Riker and his crew would retain their enthusiasm long enough to actually begin it. But the plan seemed sound: It *might* work. A damned farfetched fantasy but maybe—just this once—at last—a dream might become a reality.

He told himself there'd be prestige and tangible reward for the Liberator's right-hand man if he were clever enough to claim them. There'd be the opportunity to guide Riker's reforms, too.

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Hell—Riker'd *need* a guide to keep him ontrack.

"Why not?" he said.

"We'll be achieving great things! We'll be the saviors of an entire people!" Riker declaimed.

Abashed, Kyning realized that he was agreeing with the Elvan, thinking to himself that he might actually contribute to the development of a new and better state. He tried to squelch the thought.

He'd believed his own idealism was long dead and buried. Its stirrings disturbed him. He told himself that this venture would be for profit—nothing more. He'd study Riker's plan and research the situation and, if he found any flaw at all, he'd back out damned quick.

"We've got to put cutting edges on all these," Riker said, running a thumb along the blade he held. "Do you know how?"

"It might be better if we held off until the last minute for that."

"No, I want to do it now. I want the men to get used to handling *real* weapons."

"They'll chop their own feet off," Kyning suggested.

"If they're going to do that, I want them to do it now—not after we've begun our march. They've *got* to learn."

"Well, I'll need a honing wheel for that hand drill of yours," Kyning told him. "And a hand stone of some kind to do the finishing work. Think you can get them?"

Riker nodded. "Teach the others to do it, Kyn. It isn't proper for a General to be doing menial work himself."

"Sure," Kyning grinned. He stood up and stretched. His fingertips seemed to tingle in anticipation of the power Riker offered to put within their grasp. Power, profit and prestige—what more could a

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man ask? He thought then of Deptfort and added *revenge.*

Maybe he should thank Deptfort for stranding him on this world and putting him into this position. His grin twisted as he thought that it would be a damned sharp-edged thanks he'd give to that whoreson. As second in command of a planet, he'd be in a hell of a fine position to locate and repay the white knight.

He had accepted the *possibility* of the revolution's success. As he contemplated his own profit, he wondered at the *certainty* of it.

"We really should have some guns," he suggested.

"No!" Riker snapped back.

"But . . ."

"No, I said."

"Why the hell not?"

"Because I don't trust guns. I don't understand about them and . . . and . . ." Anger flared into Riker's face. His voice rose to a violently harsh pitch, "Because *I say no guns!* We'll do this *my* way. You understand?"

"Sure," Kyning answered soothingly. What the hell—so Riker didn't want guns—so the way he'd laid out the plan they wouldn't really need them.

The anger was gone as suddenly as it had come. Riker grinned. Clapping a hand on Kyning's shoulder, he proclaimed, "Good friend, together we will conquer the world!"

The heaps of base blocks and stacks of plasteel girders that had been seeded on the bare field of the tiltyard grew into upthrusts of walls, reaching into the vivid night sky.

Kyning was stretched out on his back with his head in Dulcinea's lap. As he talked, he gazed at the shadowed walls that, by starlight, might have been decaying bastions and the ghosts of fallen keeps.

Though not a soldier in Riker's army, Dulcinea was one of the literary group and so party to the plan of revolution. Like the others, she was sworn to secrecy, and he could speak freely to her. He might have done so anyway—she seemed so much a part of his life and his world now.

"So I've been researching, looking for some flaw," he was saying. "But everything I've found confirms the feasibility of Riker's plan. I've been over at the library building every day now . . . did you know they've got halls of archives that aren't programmed into the TV circuits? There are stacks of ancient documents, on microdots, on tape, and even on paper. There are old *handwritten* journals from the time of the Forefathers among them that have been stored away and forgotten for generations."

"How can that be?" she asked.

"Well, the Forefathers wrote a constitution and a code of ethics for Elva that was completely idealistic, but in actual practice they bypassed some of their ideals for expediency. They kept records of everything, but they established one hall of archives for those records that was time-locked to stay sealed for two centuries. I guess they figured that by then Elva would be on the steady even keel they'd planned for it and the information in the records couldn't do any harm. They were wrong about Elva though. The time-locks opened on schedule, but by then either the old hall had been forgotten or else Elvan curiosity was so suppressed that nobody cared. Probably a combination of both.

"Anyway," he continued, "as a student, I filed an application to research

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the history of Elvan electronics. Evidently the computer banks don't hold any injunctions against that sort of thing, because I got my permit. I've been wandering around the library without any supervision and I've dug up a hell of a lot of interesting information. Like stuff about the Master Computer's *conscience circuits*. You ever heard of them?"

"No."

"I don't think anyone alive today has," he told her. "The way I read it, the original founding colonists on Elva really meant well, but they made a bad mistake. They thought that mankind is basically *good*. They really believed that aggression and competitive drive—all the so-called *evils* of man—are *learned* traits. They knew that they, themselves, had these drives and they were afraid that they'd unintentionally pass them along to their descendants. They figured that if they could completely suppress the *evils* in themselves and their own children, in a few generations, every trace of those traits would disappear and that Elva would be a perfect colony of perfect people. So they invented aqapa."

"You mean they really put drugs in it to suppress peoples' natural instincts on purpose?" she asked.

"Yeah. They worked out what they wanted and had a commercial laboratory develop a strain of yeast that would produce the drug-effect. That sort of thing was semi-legal on Earth for a while. When the Forefathers set up the branch of the computer system that operates the aqapa production facilities, control of the yeast to maintain the effect was programmed in. That was step one."

"There were more?"

"Step two was the building of subliminals into the TV transmission circuitry. They wanted to insure that *everyone* would drink aqapa and would keep drinking it until all traces of evil had disappeared from Elva. That brings us to step three—the *conscience circuits*.

"You already know that all of the major computer systems on the planet are linked to the Master Computer and are, in a sense, controlled by it," he explained. "Well, the system within the Master Computer that controls aqapa production and the sublims, also collects and correlates data from other computers. It makes regular frequent analyses of the state of Elvan society and compares the evaluation with patterns for the *perfect state* that were pre-set into it by the Forefathers. If and when that pattern is ever achieved, built in destructs will be activated. The *conscience circuits* will systematically destroy themselves and, in doing it, they'll change the aqapa formulation and discontinue the sublims, leaving Elva with a *clear conscience*. That's the phrase the Forefathers used . . ."

"But it never happened," she said.

"No, and it's not likely to. The Forefathers were mistaken about the nature of mankind. The things they called *evils* aren't all learned. Aggression and competition are inherent biologically-based parts of man's survival instinct. They're directly linked with a lot of his *good* traits—curiosity, the urge to discover and learn, the drive for progress—they're the same drive . . ."

"You mean *good* and *evil* are the same thing?"

"No, but they grow from the same seed. They're just channelled differently. A man has the drive and he can learn to use it constructively. When it's completely suppressed in him, he doesn't learn a damned thing. But inhibiting the drive doesn't stop it from existing. That's why

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the destructs in the *conscience curcuits* have never triggered. Elvans have never lost their drive completely. They've just buried it so deep that they've become automatons. But they haven't come anywhere close to achieving the *perfect state* the Forefathers envisioned."

"And all these years nobody's known anything about all this," she said thoughtfully.

"The Forefathers figured it would take several generations of suppression to rid their descendants of every taint of evil and they didn't want anyone learning about the *conscience circuits* and tampering with them in the meantime," he told her. "So they designed the circuitry very subtly and the records were all sealed into the hall with the time-lock.

"When the two centuries had passed and the lock opened, Elva had already become what it is now—a planet of zombies. The people had buried all but the scantest traces of creativity and curiosity. They'd become simply herd-animals drifting along in the same patterns generation after generation.

"Look at your history," he continued, gesturing broadly. "As long as the generation of the Forefathers lived, the colony expanded and built rapidly. In the next generation there was some more expansion, but by the third generation everything was almost exactly as it is now. You had the same population and distribution, the same industries, the same interplanetary trade arrangements and regulations."

He waved toward the rising walls, "You replace worn-out equipment and buildings, but that's it. You *import* all your technological advances and all your culture. You have no invention and no literature or art of your own. What competitive drive you have left is all channelled into hobbies and most of them aren't creative. You don't *make* things, you *collect* them. You don't *evaluate* art, you *count* it. You're more interested in how many dances or concerts you see than in how good they are. You leave all the evaluations, all the decisions and responsibility to the computers. You haven't lost the *ability* to make decisions, but you've lost the *will* to do it."

"And all because of those *conscience circuits?*"

"Yes."

She bowed her head in a long moment of thought, then said, "We've got to destroy them."

"We're going to. When Riker and I take control of the MCC, we'll cut them out of the Supervisor. That's our step one. Then we institute training programs to educate the people to new ways of life. We open the port to immigration and we encourage young people to go study offplanet. We begin an interchange . . ."

"Do you *have* to take over the MCC to do it?"

"That's the plan."

"We can't we just tell the Adstrators about the *conscience circuits?*" she said. "They're the elected governors of Elva. They have the authority and the power to make decisions for our own good, according to our constitution. Once they know about these things, they'll destroy them."

"There's more to it than just that," he mumbled.

"What then?"

He cast about for some answer. But before he could find one, she said, "You *want* to take over the planet, don't you, Kyn?"

"What the hell difference does it make to Elva whether it's the Adstrators or *us* who do it? It'll still get done. That's what

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counts, isn't it?"

"*Will* it get done, Kyn? Will it be done right?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Will it all be done right with Riker in command?"

"Of course! He's an idealist. This is his dream—his chance to make his own life really mean something."

"Are you sure?"

"Okay, so he's naive and a little weird at times, but I'll be with him and between the two of us, we can make it work."

"Can you?"

"Dammit, you think I'll flub this, don't you? You think I can't handle it. You're sure I'll fail!"

"Oh no, Kyn!"

It sounded to him as if she'd said it too quickly—just to humor him.

"I mean Riker," she continued. "He's been so strange lately. He's so jumpy and short-tempered. Sometimes he doesn't make sense at all. The least little thing will make him so angry . . ."

"Sure, he's nervous now. He'll settle down after we're in power. You'd be jumpy and irritable too, if you had the fate of a planet on your mind."

"I do have the fate of a planet on my mind," she whispered. "I'm afraid."

He sighed, still feeling it was a lack of trust in him that bothered her. Slowly, he said, "Look, there isn't any way we can go wrong once we've taken over the MCC. We initiate the change—give the people the ways and means to break free of aqapa and to educate themselves. Once they've gotten the drugs out of their systems they'll begin to shape the new society themselves."

"But the weapons—attacking the MCC with swords—taking over by force—it doesn't seem right to me, Kyn. Not according to the things you've taught me from the books," she protested.

"Okay, so it's a little sticky," he mumbled. "But what the hell! What other way is there? It's what happens *afterward* that counts."

He could see her head silhouetted against the star-brilliant sky, just the outlines of her face touched by light. She was gazing toward the city as she said, "There *is* another way. Let me tell the Adstrators. I know Adstrator Gorman to speak to. He's kind and he's nice. He'll listen. Please let me."

"No, dammit! This is *my* chance too, Dulcinea. Don't ask me to give it up. I swear nobody will get hurt. I'll see to it. I promise you a bloodless coup."

"All right," she murmured, her voice reluctant.

He didn't like it—not this way. He wanted her with him, encouraging him, sharing in his achievement and taking pride in it. She was accepting the plan, but unwillingly. He could feel her disapproval as if it were a wall suddenly sprung between them. And he had a violent urge to batter it down, to sweep through the breach and draw her to him.

Dammit, this dream of emancipating Elva was *good*. It was *honorable* and *right*. A just cause. Through the years so many dreams had been shattered and lost—why did this lone one that was actually within his grasp have to be flawed?

Why couldn't she understand?

CHAPTER 10

THE DOOR BUZZER barely sounded. Kyning looked up from his book, uncertain as to whether he'd

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actually heard it or only imagined it. Had somebody tapped the button tentatively or just brushed it by accident? He waited and after a minute or so, it sounded again, hardly more distinct now than the first time.

He set down the scanner and went to open the door. It was Janneth who stood waiting, poised uncertainly. She looked almost frightened at the sight of him.

"Is Chai here?" she asked, her voice very small and fragile.

He shook his head. "Not back from work yet."

"Oh."

The eyes that gazed up at him seemed deep with misery, and she sounded disappointed to the verge of physical pain.

He asked, "You want to come in and wait? He should be here before long."

It took her a moment to decide. The bob of her head was more like a wince than a nod. Without speaking, she stepped through the doorway as hesitantly as if she were walking into someplace strange and foreboding.

There was something sure as hell bugging her, he thought as he closed the door behind her. He'd never seen her like this before. He asked himself if she might be afraid of him, and of being alone here with him. But that didn't make sense. She should know him well enough from the literary group gatherings—it had to be something more than simply his presence that was upsetting her.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable," he said. "Want some coffee or something?"

"No, thank you," she answered, her voice little more than a whisper. As if in obedience of an order, she seated herself stiffly on the end of the couch.

The tension in her had begun to echo itself in him. Feeling unpleasantly ill-at-ease, he went to the wall kitchen and took down a cup. It was more a matter of activity to cover his discomfort than of wanting coffee.

"You sure?" he asked, gesturing with the cup.

"Yes—no—oh no, don't bother, please . . ." Her voice was so ragged and needful that, despite her protest, he set up a second cup. When the coffee was ready he added a light shot of Kalvaran to each, then handed one to her.

"Go ahead, it'll help," he told her.

She accepted it, mumbling a perfunctory *thank you*. Dutifully, she sipped at it.

He moved the book and sat down, wondering whether he ought to try making conversation or should just leave her to her own devices until Riker got there. Talking might help her, but bedamned if he knew how to start it.

She was poised on the edge of the couch, as tense as the bolt in a cocked bow. He had a feeling it would only take the slightest jar to send her flying across the room and out the door again. She was really *scared*, but why?

She just sat there, gazing straight ahead.

Finally, bluntly, he asked, "You want to talk about it?"

She didn't look toward him, or move at all except to shake her head in the slightest reply. Even that seemed uncertain.

He shrugged mentally and picked up the book again. But her frightened presence was too strong. He couldn't concentrate on the page in front of him. When he realized he'd read the same line at least three times and still didn't know what it said, he put the book down again.

She still hadn't moved.

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"Talking *might* help," he suggested.

She glanced at him, then away. Staring down into the coffee cup, she said painfully, "He's changed."

"Riker?"

Her nod was barely perceptible.

"For the worse?"

Again the small nod. She clutched her silence around her protectively for a moment, then flung it away. Her voice was halting—broken—as she stammered, "It was all so wonderful before. Everything was beautiful. But—but—he's changed! I'm afraid now. I—I don't—" The words lost themselves in gasping sobs.

"Easy," he said gently. "Everything's going to be all right."

"No! No, it won't!"

"You're in love with him?" he asked.

"I don't know. I thought I understood, but—but now I don't know."

That was one point of uncertainty and despair, he decided. But there was more to her emotion than simply indecision about love. There was something very deep and real to her—something ominous.

He asked, "You're afraid *of Riker?*"

This time her nod was positive.

"But why?"

"He's changed so! Before, it was lovely. He was tender and kind, like the people in the books. But now he's—I don't understand, Kyn. He hurts me and he doesn't care. He—he—" She paused, drawing a deep breath to steady herself. "And now I—I'm—oh, Kyn, nothing like this has ever happened before! I don't know what to do."

He looked at her, feeling a growing suspicion. But he wasn't sure how to put it into words. There was still too much he didn't understand about Elvans and their society.

He asked, "Do you want him to marry you?"

Her nod and her expression answered his unspoken question. He touched her hand lightly—gently—and said, "Look, it's going to be all right. This isn't the first time it's ever happened."

"It is!" she insisted. "I don't know what to do. I won't be scheduled to marry—to have children—not for years yet!"

"Is it so terrible to break with the schedule? *You're* human, you know. Schedules and computers aren't."

"But it's never happened before."

"You're not alone," he told her. "Riker will be with you. He'll help you and take care of you."

"Will he?" She sounded bitter. "Will he, Kyn?"

"Of course."

The sobbing was overwhelming her. She could barely force out the words. "I'm afraid. I'm afraid of him!"

"Hold on. Look, he's been nervous lately. Not really himself. But there's nothing to be afraid of. He'll understand. He'll be proud and happy. I promise . . ."

"No!" she said, almost screaming, and suddenly she was on her feet, lunging toward the door.

He caught her wrist. Terrified, panicking, she wrenched against his grip.

"Wait!" he said, opening his fingers. He hadn't meant to grab her that way. It had been a reflex action.

She hesitated with her hand on the doorknob, trembling as if it were only the command in his voice that held her.

Gently, he asked, "You want me to tell him?"

Her face turned toward his, a glimmering of relief in her moist eyes. "Would you, Kyn? Please . . . I'm so

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afraid . . ."

"Sure. Don't you worry. It'll all be okay," he said, wondering if he might not be making a wrong promise. This was between Riker and the girl—none of *his* business. But she was so scared that it hurt to look at her.

She tried to smile at him.

"Sure," he repeated reassuringly.

She'd been gone at least half an hour before Riker got there. With a Cheshire grin spread across his face, he walked in and sprawled on the still-open bed.

"I've been over reconnoitering the MCC," he said.

Kyning looked at him, wondering how to begin. But instead, he said, "You've already been over that place a dozen times."

"Sure, and every time I go there, I see again just how easy it's going to be. I think we should strike soon, Kyn. *Time flies and drags us with it.* I think that we should . . ."

"You've got other things to think about right now," Kyning interrupted.

Riker lifted a questioning brow. "For instance?"

"Janneth. She was here a while ago looking for you."

"O, love, love, love! Love is like a dizziness; It winna let a poor body Gang about his business!" he sighed with a smug grin.

"She wants you to marry her," Kyning told him.

He dropped his head onto the rumpled pillow and gazed at the ceiling. "That damned pest," he mumbled.

Startled, Kyning stared at him a moment. "She *needs* a husband."

"Huh?"

"She's pregnant."

"So what?" Riker grunted, his face darkly sullen now. "That's *her* problem."

"But—but it's your child," Kyning stammered, astonished at the man's reaction.

"It's *her* problem."

"It's *your* responsibility."

With lazy over-casual movements, Riker got to his feet. He ambled indolently to the wall kitchen, keeping his back to Kyning as he made himself a cup of coffee. Then, with jerky suddenness, he wheeled. Anger flashed in his face. "What the hell business is it of yours!"

"I'm the one who told you about the game. I didn't know you'd play it this way."

"If you're so damned concerned about that bitch, *you* take care of her. Marry her yourself if you want her to have a husband. I've got more important problems . . ."

"It's *your* child!"

"To hell with it! To hell with you too, Kyning. I'm getting sick of your bloody interference. You think you know everything. You're always trying to run the show—always trying to hog the glory! This is *my* revolution. *I* am the Liberator. I'm sick of having you lecture at me and leech off me like a damned harlot! This is my room—*my planet*—and you can get the hell out!"

Kyning winced at the violence of the outburst. His hands tightened, knotting into hard-knuckled fists, as anger overwhelmed his bewilderment. As he started toward Riker, he began, "You listen to me, you . . ."

Riker flung the coffee at his face.

It was still hot—almost scalding. He clapped his hands to his face as it seared against his skin. Lunging toward the sink, he jabbed blindly at the buttons.

The water that streamed from the faucet was tepid, then chill. He grabbed

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handsful of it and splashed it up into his face. The burning eased.

His skin still stung but as he forced open his eyes he was aware that there was no real damage. Straightening, he wiped at his eyes with his sleeve. His hand was trembling and a sick knot was tightening itself in the hollow of his stomach.

It was shock, he thought. Startled physical shock that was washing the strength out of him.

He blinked and the water-blurred image of Riker came into focus. The man's stance was confident—arrogant—and his smile malevolently smug. Kyning recognized the unsheathed blade he held in his hand now. That was his own silver-hilted dagger pointing at his gut.

With a taut quietness, Riker said, "Go ahead—get out."

What the devil's happening? Kyning asked himself. The thought was edged with a kind of panic. This wasn't just an argument—it was a *fight*—a break between Riker and him. And win or lose, it would cost *him* everything. The glory of the revolution, the power and the prestige, all these things—they weren't his to grasp, but Riker's to bestow. He, Kyning, could never lead the revolution or command Elva—he was an alien—and a loser. The Elvans wouldn't follow him the way they would Riker.

No, Riker might be able to carry it off without *him*, but he could never do it without Riker. Without Riker he'd again be nothing—just a tramp actor stranded on a damned impossible planet.

Cautiously, he held out a hand. It was still trembling. In as soothing a voice as he could muster, he said, "Wait a minute—what's happening here?"

Riker gazed at him through thin slits of eyes and repeated, "I'm sick of your interference."

"I'm not trying to interfere. I don't mean to. I didn't realize that you felt—I *thought* we understood each other."

"Maybe we did *once*. But you're small, Kyning. You're petty and you're turning into a damned pest."

"But how? Why? I don't understand."

Riker's expression slowly softened as he considered. Almost smiling, he said magnanimously, "I suppose I shouldn't expect you to understand. There is a vastness, a grandeur, a glory beyond the scope of your comprehension. Like the common herd, you disturb yourself over niggardly details and lose sight of the Greater Vision."

He made a broad dramatic gesture with the dagger and added tragically, "No one else can see the whole vision. It is *my* burden. Mine alone. And my glory."

Kyning nodded, feeling a vaguely frightened awe. The man sounded insane. But—*was* there a greater vision—something beyond his own understanding? Or was it only madness?

Whichever it might be, the dream was Riker's, and the profit would be his to give or withhold. For now, it had to be reconciliation. Later, maybe, a reckoning—but not until later.

"I'm sorry," he said, trying to sound sincere. "You're right."

Riker's mouth twisted into an almost wistful smile. He sighed deeply, letting the hand that held the dagger drop to hang limply by his side.

"I ask too much of you, Kyn," he said benevolently. He stretched out the other hand. Kyning winced as it touched his shoulder and rested there.

"Good, loyal, faithful Kyn," Riker beamed. "Bear with me. My burden is heavy."

Wordlessly—unable to find words—Kyning nodded in reply.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 104)

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Robert E. Toomey, Jr. made his debut with a humorous short story in the May issue of AMAZING STORIES; here he offers a very different direction, in the story that lies behind Jeff Jones' cover painting . . .

DIRECTIONS INTO THE DARKNESS

ROBERT E. TOOMEY, JR.

Illustrated by DAN ADKINS

IT WAS PAVLOV, I believe, who first proved that men can be conditioned to ring bells at the sight of a dog preparing to salivate.

You think not?

Ask the dog.

Point of view in all matters is everything. Standing between observation and truth is the observer. Reality is *now,* is what's most immediate, the very moment of event itself, results alone. The links in the chain of cause and effect are welded together with motivations. It would seem the height of presumption to even *attempt* to guess at what *they* might be.

The Eddihan in the Speakshop made a smile-sign and said: "Cirema has sent for you, Mr. Bradley."

"That's one way of looking at it," I admitted.

"It is indeed the *only* way of looking at it."

His name was Dathad. He was short and squat, powerfully built, vaguely humanoid. He seemed to have been modelled from pliable pewter and lead. He had two arms, two legs and one head. The head was outsize, flattened in the back, bulging in the front. The legs were thick and unjointed, less than half a meter long. His arms, as if to make up the difference, were jointed twice and the first set of elbows could have leaned on the floor for support if it was needed while he continued to remain upright. His clothes were loosely fitted and dull.

This was his homeworld, Eddih. It had a one-point-eight Earth norm grav and its atmosphere, for me, was unbreathable. I had to wear an uncomfortable life-support unit with servomotors to help me get around. I was here to find a god.

The Speakshop was a filthy mess. From what I'd seen of it, the whole planet was the same way. This capital city of Eddih was nameless. It was a paragon of rancid squalor. I was happy I didn't have to smell it.

"Can you help me?" I asked.

"It depends," he said in Basic with an

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abominable accent. "I follow the way of Cirema, of course, although I have not joined him yet. But the god-man has often affirmed that an honest profit for an honest effort is most appropriate and holy." He made a small shrug-sign.

"I see," I said.

"In addition, there are other things that must be attended to before this discussion may continue fruitfully."

"I've come a long way," I said.

Another strug-sign. "Distance and chance are illusions."

"I don't see the connection."

"All things are connected. In some the connections are more obvious than in others. Let me ask you this: do you consider it an inconvenience to constantly feed and defecate?"

"In a sense."

"You claim to be a scholar."

"Yes."

"Therefore you resort to academic quibbling and—what do you call it?"

"I'm not sure what you're referring to." I was beginning to get annoyed.

"Hair-splitting," he said. "It is not a term we use."

The people of Eddih are totally bald.

He went on: "You feed because you must. You defecate because of this must. Cirema has called and you have come and the distance you have travelled is an illusion. It is possible that you will cover greater distances before you are through and perhaps I will assist you. But first we must learn why *you* yourself think you are here."

"Why? I'm willing to meet your price."

"You have not heard my price. Keep your willingness in reserve until you do. The reason is simple for my question. The followers of Cirema are not allowed to practice their worship openly. If they cannot practice it, they find it difficult to

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perfect it. Do you know about this?"

"I've heard," I said.

"Are you aware of the reason?"

"Yes. The new government here has driven the Ciremians underground."

"Do you know why?"

I was getting tired of his questions. I said, "Not entirely. I've been given a number of reasons, some of them mutually exclusive. Are you afraid I'm a spy for the government? Is that what's bothering you?"

"No, not in the least. You have come with the highest of recommendations. Still, caution reaps its own rewards. This Speakshop is being watched. *All* Speakshops are being watched, though they have not yet been declared illegal. The government believes them to be centers of foment and revolution. The government is not mistaken. Those most afraid of the next successful revolution are the leaders of the one just previous. None of this has necessarily to do with your quest. Not in any personal sense. But there are common goals involved here. You should understand clearly that those in power are inimical to Cirema and would like to find him."

"I have diplomatic immunity," I said.

"They will ship your body home then, and apologetically pay the freight."

"Are you serious? This could happen?"

He made an agree-sign. "You are getting into something far beyond your speculations, Mr. Bradley. Danger and trial. Something deep and pertinent. I do not know *where* Cirema is, but I can find him. That is why you were sent to me. I am an instrument. It is probable that you could find him yourself, but it might take longer. Gods have no conception of the passage of time. And they favor initiative. We will be watched. Our moves will be monitored. You are an alien, I a suspected revolutionary, and neither of us the best company for the other to keep. They will assume that we are up to no good."

"They will be wrong," I said.

"No, they will be right. And you will be right and I will be right and it does not matter what any of us believe. Tell me why you think you are here."

I sighed.

"It's not an easy thing to explain to a stranger. I'm here to find a god because once, when I was very much younger, I lost a god. Can you understand that, Dathad?"

He made a sympathy-sign.

"There is more to it than that," he said after an appropriate interval.

"As far as I've been able to determine, Cirema is the only god in the known galaxy whose existence hasn't been proven unquestionably false."

"And that is why you are here. To prove him false."

"If I can," I said.

"An honorable project. True gods do not fear such things."

"With the backing of the Cultural Information Exchange of Earth University, I've undertaken this on an off-semester research grant. What I'm really after is the truth."

"If there is one," he said.

"Yes."

"I will help you. We must be furtive."

I followed him through several secret passageways that sloped downwards, then up. When we emerged outside in the open, I was thoroughly confused as to our location.

The city appeared to have been carved out of a huge single block of stone. All of the houses and places of business, public buildings and the like were linked together. I stood there for a moment

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staring at the jetblack sky. Everything else seemed to melt away until there was nothing left but me and the slash of frozen night above. I lifted my arms and spoke.

"We are alone. Every single one of us is completely and irredeemably alone."

"You are wrong," Dathad said.

"I hope so," I told him.

"We will have to take the back streets."

"That's good," I said, lowering my arms with a whirr of servomotors. "There don't seem to be any front streets to be had."

Paved with dirt or rock, the streets. Rutted, some of them. Muddy in places. Dusty in others. Lit by glow-strips across the tops of the buildings that were energized by the sunlight and blotted out the stars if there were any. A ghostly glare. No shadows.

The sidewalk was stone, attached to the buildings. It slanted at a slight angle towards the gutter, which ran with a constant stream of water. The streets twisted and turned, none very wide, many quite narrow. At some points I could have spread my arms and trailed my fingers along the buildings on either side of us.

"They watch us," Dathad said.

"Where are they?" The streets were empty.

"Hidden. First we must elude them." He came closer to me, spoke low. "Cirema has taken human form. They wish to destroy the flesh he inhabits."

"Oh," I said.

"We will misdirect our pursuers. It is possible we can convince them we are up to another kind of no good. I will guide you to the district of delights."

"Good," I said.

The red-light areas of Eddih might be worth a footnote or two, I thought.

"We take our pleasures seriously," Dathad said.

"So do we."

"Common means."

It seemed as if we bored deeper and deeper into the rock. Everywhere unchanging. I don't know how he managed to find his way around. The unshadowed sameness of the buildings pressed upwards into the living black.

Finally Dathad stopped.

"We turn here," he said, indicating an alleyway. "But before we do, I would like to show you something."

"Sure," I said.

"Do you see that?" He gestured at the gutter.

"Yes."

"Come with me."

We walked a few paces further. Dathad looked like a dwarf sailor on his jointless legs. He moved stiffly as though trying to maintain his balance on the rolling deck of a ship in heavy weather.

Out of a wall sprang a gushing spigot carved in a phallic likeness.

"One of our sacred fountains," Dathad said. "They use it to clean the troughs. Does this seem to you a sacrilege?"

"I don't have any particular feelings on the matter one way or the other," I said.

"Neither do we. The waters are pure. They are used to clean, a holy purpose. Now we go to the district of delights."

We retraced our steps to the alleyway. Dathad started in and was hurled back by a scarlet flash of light as brilliant as a magnesium flare. It sheared him in half. He lay on the stone sidewalk in two pieces, and the halves of him writhed and humped as if trying to reconnect themselves. Then they lay still. A bluish fluid ran off from the rented flesh and mingled with the sacred stream in the gutter.

I felt shocked and nauseated. An

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instant later I felt terror.

With a tremendous effort of will I restrained my gagging reflex. There are few things worse than vomiting inside a sealed life-support unit.

But death is worse. Another reflex took over and belatedly I turned to run.

"Don't move!" someone shouted. "Movement is death!"

I froze.

A spiked fist was clenching and unclenching in my throat and my heart hammered the fear through my veins.

Two Eddihans in official uniforms emerged from the mouth of the alley. Both carried weapons. One of them stalked up to me and clamped a command override around my wrist. I lost all volitional control of my l-s unit.

"You will come with us," he said, like I had a choice.

The other rolled the remnants of Dathad's body off the sidewalk and into the trough. The water swirled over the pieces and they began to wash away and disintegrate.

I was brought through the glowing streets to a building. Into the building to a room. They interrogated me there in utter pitch darkness. I was kept immobilized by means of the command override.

"You are in very bad trouble, Mr. Bradley," a voice said.

"This treatment of me is incredible," I said. "I want to speak to my consul."

"Impossible."

A spot between my shoulderblades itched and I couldn't get at it.

I said: "I'm attached to the Terran Diplomatic Corps. I have diplomatic status and I demand that you place me in contact with my embassy at once."

"Absurd. You are a spy. You have been duly apprehended while in the act of conspiring to overthrow the present and recognized administration of this, an independent planet. A very serious charge, Mr. Bradley."

"I was doing no such thing."

The itch was spreading.

"The facts argue against you. It would be surprising if your embassy were not to claim an unhappy ignorance of your actions and turn you over to the local authorities as a gesture of good will."

I started to say something, then stopped. It was clear my position was not too strong.

"What is your reason for being on Eddih?" the voice asked.

The itches were driving me mad.

"I don't have to answer that," I said.

And screamed as an electric charge blazed through me.

The current died down to a low voltage trickle. Just enough to keep me from forgetting. And I still had the itches.

"If necessary, Mr. Bradley, we will torture you until you beg and plead with us to listen to anything you might have to say. It would be unfortunate, but we are concerned here with a larger interest. Preserving the stability of our newly formed government may be considered the larger interest in this context."

I decided not to be stubborn.

"I'm here to find Cirema," I said.

"Why?"

"Strictly for academic purposes. I'm associated with the Cultural Information Exchange of Earth University."

"You were found to be consorting with a well-known political deviate."

"He was my guide and contact."

"Who introduced you to him?"

"I don't know."

Shock!

"All we ask for is cooperation, Mr.

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Bradley."

"I swear to you! I don't know. You're not given a research project like this overnight, just for the asking. You have to present your qualifications to a committee, exhibit an interest in your subject and prove your competence in dealing with it. That sort of thing takes time. Meanwhile, I sent out feelers and got a response. He was just a voice on the vidphone on Earth. The viewscreen was left blank. He told me where to go and who to meet there."

"And you simply took the word of this unidentified voice?"

"Why not?"

"What were your plans when you found Cirema, if you found him?"

"To either prove or disprove his divinity."

"How?"

"Whatever way seemed most feasible under the circumstances."

"We have been trying to find him also."

"Yes, I know."

"It is possible, Mr. Bradley, that we can determine a way of working together on this matter. Would you be willing?"

"Yes," I said.

Anything. Just let me scratch.

The lights came on and blinded me.

They told me where to go and what to do.

The Eddihan in the second Speakshop agreed, after checking back on my references, to help me find Cirema. His name was Kirlrik, and I could not have easily told him apart from Dathad if I'd seen them together, if Dathad hadn't been dead.

Kirlrik led me to another room in another building somewhere else in the city maze. The lights were already on in this one. A group of Eddihans sat around a table there, looking rather doll-like and mechanical with their legs stuck stiffly out in front of them.

On the table was money and a device that resembled a model of a molecular chain. Round balls supported by a series of thin transparent plastic tubes, the whole thing making a complex geometrical construct. A liquid of some sort appeared to be bubbling through the tubes and the balls were continually changing color. The entire apparatus sat on a sort of automatic lazy susan and revolved very slowly.

"They are betting on which color will show up when," said Kirlrik. "It is a completely random thing."

"Oh," I said. "Well, they seem to have stopped."

They had stopped. They were staring at me and making query-signs at Kirlrik.

"They do not know who you are," Kirlrik said. "I will tell them."

He introduced me and vouched for me and explained my problem to them. What he believed to be my problem. They began to discuss the probable whereabouts of Cirema. It appeared that he moved around quite a lot.

"He was in Brytlon, three weeks ago," one of them said. "Many were joined to him there. Many others were converted. The authorities showed up and he left just in time."

"I saw him in Holorat," said another, "during the celebration of Eboona, the Feast of Slaughtered Children. He looked well, spoke briefly, blessed the faithful and vanished."

"Literally vanished?" I asked.

"No, he left by hovercopt. As far as the authorities are concerned however, he vanished."

"Has anyone seen him lately?" I asked.

They hemmed and hawed for a while

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and finally admitted that Cirema had been making himself pretty scarce in recent times. Things were getting hotter for him than he liked, and he'd more or less dropped out of sight until they cooled, if they cooled.

"You might check with Gliggor, the Guildsculpter," one of the gamblers suggested at last. "If anyone would know, it would be him. He almost joined up with Cirema in Holorat, or so he claims."

"Gliggor carries himself with caution and keeps his eyes open," someone else agreed.

"What do you think?" I asked Kirlrik.

"He might know. It is clear that nobody in *this* group does."

"So let's go see him."

We left, after declining an invitation to join the group, and behind us as we went out, I could hear the wagers starting up again.

The Sculptshop was filled with limbs and torsos and heads, all molded from paraflex, humanity's major artistic contribution to the ages, in some people's opinion. Paraflex comes in whatever colors you choose, and the colors are true ones. Any fragment of it will bond to any other fragment permanently on contact, and without showing a seam. It remains easily workable in its natural state and goes practically diamond hard the instant you play a certain specific set of resonating frequencies across it. To soften again, you use a different specific set of frequencies. The man who discovered it sold the process patent to a manufacturing concern for 12.5 percent of the total gross revenue derived from its sale. It had been a good investment on all sides. Paraflex is one of Earth's largest staple exports to the galaxy.

Gliggor, the Guildsculpter, looked absurd in an artist's gray smock and a blue beret with a red puffball on top. His manner was brisk.

Kirlrik told him who I was and explained what I wanted.

"I believe I can help you," Gliggor said. "Will you wait here for a moment?"

I said that I would.

He left the room. I wandered around, looking at the bits and pieces and odds and ends of statuary, picking things up and setting them down. They were good, solid commercial products without the slightest trace of originality or inspiration that I could see. Of course, my knowledge of what passed as art here was rather limited. I commented on it to Kirlrik.

"He is a Guildsculpter," Kirlrik said. "What would you expect from such a one?"

"I wouldn't know what to expect."

"What you see. He does a high-volume, mass-production business, much of it on a mail-order basis. He signs his work with a common name, used also by several others."

Gliggor came back. The smock and beret were gone, but his new outfit looked no less absurd. He was dressed in a parti-colored skintight jumpsuit.

"I have spoken to Cirema," he said. "He wishes to see you."

"Good," I said. "I wish to see him, too."

"Your wishes are of little importance."

"When?" I asked.

"Now. Come with me. You will stay here," he said to Kirlrik, who made an agree-sign.

Gliggor didn't say much to me as we walked through the illuminated night streets. It was just as well. I was feeling little rushes of anticipation at the thought of meeting Cirema. And little rushes of dread at what I would do and cause to happen at that meeting.

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We entered a private residence. Gliggor led me downstairs and pressed a hidden release on a wall in the celler. A panel sprang back and we began to descend more steps.

At the bottom was another wall. My guide hit another release and a section of the wall pivoted heavily with a grinding sound. We went into a long tunnel lighted by dim phosphorescent lichen that grew out of the rock.

"Walk carefully," I was warned.

The tunnel was a long one. It sloped downward. The thermometer in my l-s unit indicated a drop in temperature. Pressure increased. The servomotors revved a little.

"The river flows above us," Gliggor said.

The tunnel came to a dead end. There was a brief silent pause. Then the blank wall pivoted and I could see another flight of steps.

We went up them, emerged in a large open room filled with armed Eddihans. After some conversation, I was brought to face a door.

"From here you must go by yourself," the Guildsculpter said.

I nodded.

"Just a knock on the door," he told me, "and wait."

"Thanks," I said.

He made a sign that I didn't recognize. "It is my penance for choosing not to join with Cirema."

He left me.

I knocked on the door. After a time, it opened. A naked, filthy dirty Eddihan opened it for me. We stared at each other for a long moment, then he stepped aside and said, "Enter."

I did so and he closed the door behind me.

"I am Cirema," he said.

The room was a cave. It was littered with old clothing and tables and chairs and other things. In the center of the floor was a small pool of water.

By now, the authorities had fixed my location. The little bug I was carrying for them guaranteed that. They were on their way. All I had to do was stall.

"I am a student," I said. "I've come all the way from Earth to interview you."

He made a negation-sign.

"No. You have come all the way from Earth to betray me," he said.

We faced each other. I felt a sudden burst of fear.

"Instead," Cirema said softly, "you will join me."

We stared at the bulky, foolish life-support unit. The body inside it was dead. The body wanted to collapse, but the suit wouldn't let it.

We reached out and switched the l-s unit off. We dismantled it quickly and devoured the body. The bones we threw into the pool, where they began to dissolve.

We eluded the authorities with no difficulty.

Now we are waiting again. Others will come and they will join us. Eventually we will all be joined. We are waiting and time means nothing to us. We can wait forever if we have to.

—Robert E. Toomey, Jr.

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The ELIXIR OF

By HENRY KUTTNER

A Fantastic Classic

Trouble is no word for what happened to Richard Raleigh when he set out to demonstrate Dr. Meek's strange elixir

RICHARD RALEIGH sensed trouble the moment he entered the laboratory. His employer, Dr. Gaspar Meek, looked far too pleased with himself. Either somebody was dead or else Meek had been pulling the wings off flies again. That was the way he was. A nice guy who would have got along swell with Torquemada or maybe Nero.

Besides, Raleigh was worrying about his frogs. They had vanished without trace. His bronzed, good-looking face wore an expression of bitterness as he sat down in a protesting chair and tried to marshal the innumerable things he wanted to say to Meek. After a while, he asked,

"Well?"

"Ah," said the scientist, whirling like a Buddha on his desk chair. His bland, fat face shone in the sunlight. His bald spot glowed with an unholy light.

"Ah," he repeated, with more emphasis. "There you are, Rick. I—uh—I have finally decided that the job you hold is unworthy of your talents."

"What do you mean, job?" Raleigh asked. "I'm assistant, cook, errand boy, bottle washer and general stooge. Five jobs at least."

Meek ignored the note of irony.

"I have at last decided to allow you to aid me in my experiments. You are promoted. We are colleagues. Your salary is still the same," he hastened to add, "but what is money compared to the glory of serving science?"

Raleigh choked back the impulse to remark that money would mean he could marry Binnie, Meek's lovely but slightly bird-brained daughter. How a heel like the Doc could have fathered such an angel as Binnie was an insoluble problem. It created its own problems too. For Binnie was an old-fashioned girl and wouldn't marry without her father's permission.

"Get Daddy to say 'yes'," she had murmured into her lover's ear, "and everything will be swell . . ."

"Did you speak?" Meek inquired, breaking into his thoughts.

"'Frogs' was all I said," Raleigh grunted. "Two months I've been raising giant frogs to make some extra money, and now I find the frog pond empty." His gaze searched the room.

For some reason Meek chuckled.

"Never mind that. Look here."

He indicated several small glass vials that stood on his desk, some with red and some with green labels.

"Let's get to business. I expect some visitors shortly, and I want you to stay here till they go. Don't say anything. Just listen."

Raleigh stared at the vials.

"Oh. Your invisibility elixir. Who are the visitors?"

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INVISIBILITY

"Reporters."

"Uh?" The young man goggled. "After what happened? After the gags the papers have been running—"

A singularly nasty gleam came into Meek's blue eyes.

"Yes. They called me a faker, I believe—a publicity-hunter. Well, I think they've changed their minds.

"Ah—there's the bell."

RALEIGH sighed, got up, went into the outer office, opened the door, and was brushed on a wave of excited reporters. A dozen of them at least, yelping for Doctor Meek and with blood in their eyes. Vaguely hoping that they'd tear the scientist limb from limb, Raleigh let them enter.

Meek greeted them happily.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Have chairs."

There were only two chairs, but it was a minor point, unnoticed in the babble. A burly legman leaned over the desk and extended his hands. Either

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he was reaching for Meek's throat, or else he was tightly gripping something invisible.

"Frogs!" the reporter said hoarsely. "Invisible frogs! And me with a hangover. My God!"

He shuddered slightly and opened his hands. There was a slight *plop!* on the desk blotter, a scrambling sound, and a splash from the goldfish bowl in the corner. One of the reporters, a round-faced individual, emitted a faint, faraway sound and drank hurriedly from a brown bottle.

"I can stand a lot," said the first speaker. "Maybe you had justification. But in the name of God, couldn't you have proved your point in some other way? Look. A parcel comes addressed to me. I open it and it's empty. Then an invisible frog comes up and hits me in the face."

"A dirty trick," said the short, squat man with jet-black hair and a drooping eyelid.

A cry came from the corner. Richard Raleigh was touched to the quick.

"My frogs—" he began in a heartfelt voice. "Be careful where you step, you men."

Meek coughed warningly. "Gentlemen," he said loudly. "I apologize, of course. I had to insure your coming here to watch my little demonstration. As I wrote you before, I have invented a fluid that causes invisibility by creating complete transparency in material objects.

"I don't know exactly how it works myself. I think some radiation is induced in the cellular or atomic structure—at least, it makes clothing invisible as well as flesh and blood.

"This"— he picked up one of the red-labeled vials— "is the invisibility elixir. The green-labeled ones are the antidote."

"Invisible frogs," said the first reporter dully. "I'm not going to write this if I vanish myself. It's the d. t.'s."

"I had expected skepticism," Meek continued, "and so I shall give you complete proof. I want you gentlemen to station yourselves at various points around this block. You"—he pointed at one—"will find your handkerchief stolen. You—will lose your hat. You—"

"Not my wallet," said that one, hastily buttoning his hip pocket. "Yesterday was payday."

"I shall visit you invisibly and give you complete proof. I'll leave my card with you all." Meek extended his leather cardcase. "Will that convince you?"

"Yeah," a sad voice said. "It'll do more than that, I'm afraid. Frogs . . ." There was a confused, hopeless mumbling.

"Good," Meek said briskly, rubbing his hands. He shooed the reporters out like chickens. There was a momentary confusion; then the room was empty save for the scientist and Raleigh.

THE latter stood in a corner, eyeing the desk. He had a brief impression that some of the vials had vanished. Perhaps—

"Now!" Meek whirled on his assistant. "Take this cardcase, quick."

"Me?" Raleigh stammered, trying to back through the wall. "Bub-bub—"

The doctor snatched up a red-labeled vial and advanced, blood in his eye.

"Drink this!"

Raleigh ducked. "I will," he said, "like hell! I have stood for a lot, but when it comes to being a guinea pig—"

Meek rubbed one of his chins thoughtfully.

"Now listen," he said in a placating tone. "You heard me tell the reporters my plan. They're stationed around the block now, waiting for an invisible man."

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"They're waiting for you," the other pointed out.

"Well, if you're invisible, they won't know the difference," Meek said with perfect logic.

"It's the last straw! You steal my frogs and then—" Raleigh choked. Only the image of Binnie restrained him from picking up Meek and battering him around the room.

"Yes," the doctor said unctuously. "Binnie. I have been thinking I'd take a trip to Mexico with her. I've also been thinking of firing you."

Raleigh writhed. But Meek held all the cards. Reluctantly he let the vial be thrust into his hand . . .

The door opened, admitting Binnie and an extroverted dog. The girl was not noteworthy, despite her prettiness, and Raleigh was deceiving himself when he saw wings sprouting from her back. The dog, however, was worthy of notice.

For one thing, Angel was an exhibitionist. He was large and nondescript, with a tinge of bloodhound in his sinister ancestry. Angel was also an arrant coward, but showed his adequate teeth at every opportunity. A dog of good taste, he heartily disliked Meek.

The sight of Binnie caused a violent reaction within Raleigh. Some might call it love. At any event, knowing that his future depended on Dr. Meek's good will, Raleigh swallowed the elixir and immediately discovered that the missing frogs had taken up residence in his stomach.

They did it gradually and by stealth. Down his gullet they went slipping and scrambling, to land with a succession of dull thuds in the stomach itself. Then they joined hands and danced a bolero. Desperately Raleigh seized his head and held it in place just as it began to float off.

"Gwlg—nwhnk!" he observed.

Binnie turned, startled. "Wh—what was that? Did I hear something, Dad?"

"Not at all," Meek denied, smiling. "Just something I—uh—was going to eat. Did you want me?"

The girl turned a rather lovely pink. "I was looking for Rick. He—*oh!*" A peculiar reaction seemed to have overtaken Binnie. Her eyes were lambent.

The doctor looked startled.

"What's wrong?"

The girl gulped and looked down.

"Nothing. It—felt like somebody kissed me. Isn't that silly?"

"Damned silly," Meek remarked grimly, glaring at empty air. "You must excuse me, Binnie. I have work to do I—"

He paused, his gaze riveted on the unusual antics of the extroverted dog.

ANGEL was in trouble. His nose was deceiving him. There was a ghost in the room—the ghost of a smell. It smelled like Raleigh, but that gentleman obviously wasn't present. Angel shook his ears away from his eyes and stared around in a baffled and hopeless manner. No Raleigh. But the smell remained.

Angel put his nose on the carpet and proceeded to drag himself after it, sniffing audibly. Abruptly he halted, with a muffled shriek. His nose had come in violent contact with an invisible shoe.

It was a toss-up whether or not Angel would collapse. The unfortunate beast began to tremble in every limb. Raleigh, taking pity on the creature, bent down and stroked Angel's head.

That was the last straw. With a loud cry of distress the dog fainted.

Meek cleared his throat. Significantly he turned toward the door and opened it, allowing room for the invisible Raleigh to pass through. Under his breath he muttered,

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"The cardcase?"

"Got it," came an almost inaudible whisper—and Raleigh was gone, leaving a slightly hysterical beast and a girl who, though puzzled, was rather pleased than otherwise.

CHAPTER II

The Robbery

ANGEL'S recovery was swift. His bump of curiosity brought him back to consciousness. With canine instinct, he divined that the enigma had left the room, so Angel followed with frantic speed, almost upsetting Dr. Meek. There came the sound of a closing door, followed by quiet, vitriolic profanity spilling from the learned savant's lips.

He sent Binnie away and went back into his office, to practice various positions before a full-length mirror. Some of the reporters had carried cameras.

Meanwhile the invisible man was lying in the gutter outside the house, nursing a bruised knee. Trouble had been immediate. Raleigh's feet hadn't been where he imagined, and he had taken a nasty spill as a consequence. It was, in a way, like trying to walk with your eyes closed. Distances were too easily misgauged. Raleigh clambered erect, discovered that he had lost the cardcase, and searched for it. It lay nearby, and vanished as he picked it up.

What now? He looked around, feeling oddly isolated and lonely. There were few passers-by. A street car rumbled past. One of the reporters was leaning against a lamp post not far away.

Reminded of his errand, Raleigh slowly began to walk toward the man. He paused directly in front of him, waiting. The reporter made no sign. Obviously he didn't see Raleigh.

The latter delicately reached out and snatched the handkerchief that protruded from the reporter's pocket. So swiftly did it vanish that its disappearance went unnoticed. The reporter yawned, found a cigarette, and lit a match on his thumbnail.

Raleigh grinned. This was going to be easy. He extracted a card from the case and slipped it into his victim's pocket in lieu of the handkerchief.

As he turned away, there came a loud sniff from behind him. Angel was on the trail, his bloodhound instincts fully aroused. His hopeless whine seemed to say,

"What the hell *is* this, anyhow?"

Fearing complications, Raleigh hurried off. There was another reporter halfway down the block, and he accomplished his errand there before the dog caught up with him. A third reporter was leaning against the granite wall of the Fifth Security Bank on the corner, and Raleigh got his cigarette case unnoticed. He was beginning to enjoy the feeling of power his invisibility gave him. If only that damned dog would keep its distance!

But Angel was dogged, in more than one way. People paused to stare at the odd antics of the creature, who was indulging in some sort of acrobatic dance. He had again located Raleigh, and had decided to leap up and lick his friend's face. Since the man was invisible, Angel's antics looked decidedly peculiar.

A crowd gathered. "Hydrophoby," said a lean spinster wearing steel-rimmed glasses.

"Nuts," said a tall, cadaverous man with sad eyes. "The dog's drunk."

He paused, stared, and after brief consideration, added,

"No. *I'm* drunk. Or else mad. Look at that! Is that ghastly-looking dog actually floating in the air, or am I mad?"

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THE spinster did not answer, having collapsed in a faint. Cries of amazement rose from the gathering crowd. There was reason.

As Angel sprang up, Raleigh automatically had seized the dog in order to prevent him from falling and hurting himself. To the onlookers it seemed as though Angel was hanging unsupported some four feet above the sidewalk, frantically scrambling and grunting as though trying to maintain the precarious position.

A policeman pushed his way through the group. His red face turned redder.

"Break it up!" he commanded. "What's going on here, anyway?"

Nobody answered. It wasn't necessary. Patrolman Donovan compressed his lips firmly. A man of little imagination, he realized only that a dog was floating in the air and causing a disturbance. Ergo, the dog would have to come down.

Marching forward, Donovan placed his large hands on Angel's back and endeavored to press the beast down to safer ground. Raleigh automatically pushed up. Compressed thus painfully, Angel gasped, cursed softly, and bit the policeman.

Donovan staggered back, gritting his teeth. He withdrew his nightstick and came on again, looking dangerous. Fearing complications, Raleigh acted.

The dog seemed to leap through the air, to come violently in contact with Donovan's face. The two, man and beast, collapsed on the sidewalk, but did not remain there. Angel seized the opportunity of biting his tormentor again, after which he fled, Donovan in hot pursuit. Seeing that the spectacle was ended, the crowd dispersed.

So did Raleigh. He glanced at his wrist-watch, discovered that he couldn't see it, and continued on his errand. It didn't take long.

Fifteen minutes later he stepped invisibly into Meek's outer office, using his key. Silently he went into the laboratory, where the scientist still sat behind his desk.

"Okay," Raleigh said.

Meek had glanced up nervously.

"Oh, it's you. I was afraid—it wouldn't do for the reporters to come in yet. They mustn't know you were the invisible man instead of me. Everything all right?" He thrust a vial at Raleigh, who drank its contents.

A violent shock seized him and then let go. Meek's gaze, which had been wandering around the room, settled. He nodded.

"Good. You're visible again. Well, what happened?"

"Everything went off fine." Raleigh put his loot on the desk. Then the bell rang.

"I'm relieved," Meek smiled. "I didn't know how the stuff would work on a human being. So far I used it only on frogs and lower animals."

Raleigh repressed an impulse to wring the scientist's neck. Instead, he went to the door and admitted a horde of reporters. They emitted short, sharp cries and surrounded Meek's desk.

"You're just on time," said the latter. "Well? Are you satisfied?"

THERE were affirmative noises. A tall, cold-eyed man whom Raleigh did not recognize stepped forward.

"You made yourself invisible?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What a scoop!" chortled a reporter.

The cold-eyed man said, "Doctor Meek, you're under arrest."

In the stunned silence he exhibited a gleaming badge.

"Where's the money?"

Meek was a statue. But the reporters burst into a babble of excited ques-

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tions. The detective quelled them.

"The Fifth Security Bank on the corner has just been robbed. So—"

"You're crazy!" Meek yelped. "I'll sue you for slander! I—I—"

"Listen," the detective said. "I saw the whole thing. Banknotes. Packages of them. Floating through the bank and out the door. Banknotes don't have wings. I wouldn't have guessed what happened if I hadn't got talking to the reporter who was waiting outside the bank. You didn't get away with it, Meek—and you'd better make it easy for yourself. Where's the dough?"

Raleigh turned green. He met Meek's accusing stare and winced. He knew what the scientist must be thinking. Sure, Raleigh needed money to marry. It would have been easy for him to slip unobserved into the bank and—

"That's the man," Meek snarled, thrusting out a pudgy finger at his assistant. "I—I didn't make myself invisible. He did it for me. I was here all the time."

"Can you prove that?" the detective asked. "I thought you couldn't. It won't work, pal. There's too much evidence against you. Every reporter in this room is a witness. You left your card with all of 'em. Where's the money?"

Meek snatched for a red-labeled vial on the desk before him. The detective forestalled him. Handcuffs clicked.

"If that's the way you want it, okay," the lawman grunted. "Come along."

"Raleigh!" screamed the trapped Meek. "I'll kill you for this!"

The door burst open and Binnie appeared, dragging Angel after her.

"What—"

In brief, cogent syllables Dr. Meek explained the situation.

"Your boy friend robbed a bank and threw the blame on me. I—"

"Come *on*," said the detective, and dragged his protesting captive away. The reporters followed. Alone in the office, Binnie, Raleigh and Angel looked at one another.

The girl sobbed faintly and buried herself in Raleigh's arms.

"Oh, Rick, what's happened?"

He explained. "It wasn't my fault. You know that, Binnie, don't you?"

She hesitated. "Are you—sure?"

"Binnie! You know I wouldn't—"

"But it does look funny. I believe you, dear, but you have to admit—oh, can't we *do* something? Can't *you* do something?"

"What?" Raleigh asked hopefully.

BINNIE'S lips tightened. "You've got to save Dad. He can't prove his innocence. He may be sent to prison. Then—then I simply couldn't marry you, Rick."

Raleigh grunted. "But how could it have happened? Money floated out of the bank, but I was the only invisible man in existence."

"Were you?"

There was a little silence. Raleigh said slowly,

"Uh-huh. I get it. *Another* invisible man—but how?"

He considered. "Somebody else might have invented an invisibility elixir, but that's too much of a coincidence. We'll take it for granted that those vials on the desk are the only ones in existence."

"No," Binnie said. "There's more in the safe." She nodded toward a large wall-safe in one corner.

"Okay, but that's locked. Only your father knows the combination. There's more of the elixir and the antidote in the safe—but we can forget about that just now. Those vials on the desk are important."

Raleigh's eyes widened. "Come to

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think of it, I *did* have an idea that there were less of them."

"When?"

"After the reporters first arrived—Whoa! Listen to this, Binnie! Suppose one of that gang wasn't a reporter?"

"But—"

"No, listen! It's a perfect setup for a crook. Suppose he heard, somehow, what was going to happen today. Suppose he pretended to be a reporter, came in with the others, and swiped a couple of vials when nobody was looking. After he left, he could simply make himself invisible and rob the bank—and the blame would be thrown on your father."

"You've got it, I bet," Binnie agreed. "But what can we do?"

"Wait a minute." Raleigh was counting the vials. "Uh-huh. Two missing, besides the ones I used. One of the elixir and one of the antidote."

He shook his head. "I can't tell the police a story like that."

"Then you'll just have to get proof," Binnie said decidedly. "No, keep away from me. You get Dad out of this mess. You got him into it."

Touched to the quick by the unfair accusation, Raleigh gasped. Then his lips tightened.

"Okay," he nodded. "But if I do—will you marry me?"

"Yes," said Binnie, and Raleigh hurried out of the office.

CHAPTER III

Tough Guy

EVIDENCE. That was the thing. The whirlpool in Raleigh's brain gave little chance for coherent thought; but he knew, from the many detective stories he had read, that clues were vital. Where could he find them? At the bank, perhaps.

But it wasn't at the bank that Raleigh discovered a clue. It was across the street, near a vacant lot. And it consisted of small fragments of shattered glass, from which a subtle odor still rose.

Embedded in the glass was a soaked green label.

The antidote! Raleigh shut his eyes tightly, trying to visualize what had happened. Invisible, the crook had entered the bank and stolen the money. Then, fleeing, he had accidentally dropped the vial containing the antidote. That meant—

It meant that the culprit was still invisible. He'd have to remain invisible unless he could get more of the antidote!

How to catch an unseen thief? Raleigh rubbed his aching head. Sight was useless. When he himself had been invisible, only Angel had detected his presence.

Angel . . . bloodhounds . . . *that was it!* He'd set Angel on the trail. It was a long chance, but the only one.

It took Raleigh five seconds to get back to the house. Binnie was nowhere around. The office was empty.

"Angel!" he called. "Here! Dinner!"

A violent blow caught Raleigh on the chest. He sat down painfully, while a limp, warm, wet object began to pass rapidly over his face. Angel, it seemed, was pleased by the prospect of dinner.

"Oh, my God," Raleigh groaned. "That damned dog's invisible too."

It was true. The floor was a shambles, consisting of objects which had once reposed on the desk. Glittering glass shards were everywhere. Pushing away the unseen dog, Raleigh began to scrabble among the wreckage. Finally he sat back, sighing deeply.

Only two vials remained unbroken. Both were red labeled—the invisibility

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elixir. No trace of the antidote remained. But, Raleigh remembered, there was a good supply of it in the safe. He'd just get the combination from Meek and—

There was no time for that now. The scent might grow cold—perhaps was too cold already. He'd have to use an invisible bloodhound to track an invisible thief.

How?

Raleigh secured Angel's collar and leash. By dint of much effort, he finally adjusted things to his satisfaction and stood up, holding the loop of the leash in his hand. His teeth began to chatter.

It wasn't a pleasant sight. The leash stood out rigidly from Raleigh's fingers, ending in a dog collar that hung unsupported in empty air, bouncing up and down slightly. It was impossible to believe that Angel was really there. Raleigh, on a mad impulse, tried to stick his hand through the nothingness inside the collar, and got nipped.

"Okay," Raleigh groaned. "Try and behave, Angel. Quiet. To heel."

HE opened the door and departed, doing his best to ignore the collar and leash. It would have been easier to ignore an earthquake.

Luckily, the street was almost deserted. No one noticed anything amiss as Raleigh dragged the dog to his destination. There he pushed Angel's nose toward the broken vial on the sidewalk and muttered:

"Trail! Trail, stupid! Go get him!"

The bloodhound in the composite dog rose to the surface. With a deep bay Angel plunged away, snapping the leash out of Raleigh's hand. Then was seen an incredible sight which caused half a dozen people to go mad and sent a curvaceous blonde screaming into a saloon with wild gestures.

"Double Scotch!" she gasped to the bartender. "Quick! I just saw a man chasing a snake down the street, and it was the damnedest snake I ever saw!"

The frantic collar and leash sped on. Cursing softly, Raleigh pursued, his hand outstretched. Angel was on the trail. . . .

"A snake!" cried a uniformed policeman. He whipped out his service revolver and took steady aim, only to find the gun wrested from his hand by Raleigh. The cop tried to wrench free.

"Let go!" he shouted. "It'll bite somebody—"

"No, no!" Raleigh babbled. "It hasn't any teeth. It— it's an old snake. A pet. We've had it in the family for years. Don't shoot!"

There was a scuffle, terminated by Angel himself. A dog of honor, he had discovered that Raleigh was apparently in trouble. Giving up the trail momentarily, he returned and, waiting for an opportune moment, bit the policeman in the pants. This caused a distraction, and before the cop had recovered, Raleigh was around the corner, the leash again safely in his hand.

"Ground glass," he promised the dog. "That's what you'll get for dinner. With arsenic on the side. I'll tear you apart with my bare hands—after you find the guy I'm looking for."

But Angel had stopped. He was sniffing at a closed door. Raleigh opened it, revealing a flight of stairs that led up into dimness. A cheap rooming house, from which odors of cooking drifted down not too enticingly.

Angel plunged madly up, dragging Raleigh. One flight. Two. Three. The top story—

Before another door the dog halted. He sniffed, glanced at Raleigh—something the man did not, of course, know—and barked shortly. Nothing happened.

Raleigh's stomach had turned into

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ice. Behind this door, he realized, was his quarry. So what?

Heartily he wished the policeman had followed him. Unarmed, he could do little against an invisible crook who no doubt packed a rod. Well—he'd have to get help. Cops. Lots of them. Hundreds of them, Raleigh hoped. He turned to tiptoe away.

Just then the door swung open. Angel, in a generous effort to help, had hurled his weight against the panel, and the ancient lock gave way with a grunt. The door opened.

RALEIGH'S quick glance back showed him a cheaply furnished room, in the center of which stood a table set for one. A partially devoured steak lay on a platter. The room was empty.

Sweat burst out on Raleigh's forehead. He tiptoed in. Then he stopped. His stomach hurt. Something had jabbed him there.

"Don't move," said a low, deadly voice. "I mean, put up your hands. That's right."

"Ug—ug—I came to rent a room," Raleigh gasped.

"Yeah? You don't act surprised not to see me. I know you. Meek's sidekick. I saw you in his office. Now turn around and get into that room if you don't want a tunnel through you."

Raleigh obeyed. As he crossed the threshold, he dodged aside suddenly and cried,

"Angel! Get him!"

Nothing happened. From the table came a low grunt. The steak on the platter was vanishing in large bites. Angel wasn't interested in crooks at the moment. It wasn't often that he got a bone with such delectable meat on it.

"My dinner," said the crook bitterly, closing the door. "Oh, well. I was having a hell of a time. Kept putting the fork in my eye. This invisibility isn't all it's cracked up to be."

A key turned in the lock and flew away to disappear, apparently into the robber's pocket.

"Sit down."

Raleigh sat down on a rickety couch. He felt unseen hands patting him.

"No gat. Okay. How'd you find me? Never mind. I can figure it out. Rudy Brant's no sucker."

"Rudy Brant, eh?"

"Yeah. What's your handle?"

Raleigh told him. Then, summoning his courage, he went on.

"You'd better come along quietly. I know you've lost the antidote. You've got to remain invisible—"

"I'm glad you dropped in," Brant interrupted. "I was going to pay you a call anyhow. This antidote—where can I get some more of it?"

"You can't."

A jolting blow rocked Raleigh's head. He saw stars. There was a knife edge of hysteria in Brant's voice as he snarled,

"Don't get smart with me, wise guy! I—feel this." A sharp point dug painfully into Raleigh's stomach. "Feel that shiv? I can slice you up—"

"Don't," the other said faintly.

"Where's the cure?"

"Locked in Meek's safe. The rest of it got spilled."

"Yeah? That's what you say." The knife dug deeper.

"It's the truth," Raleigh gulped.

"Well—I guess so. That don't matter. You go open that safe. I'll be right behind you. I need the antidote—bad. I can't go on like this."

Raleigh found it difficult to speak.

"Sure, Brant. Glad to. Only—only I haven't got the combination. Wait a minute! Don't lose your head. Meek's the only man who knows how to open the safe."

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BRANT said slowly, "Where is he?"

"In jail—for bank robbery."

There was a low chuckle. "You're his stooge, huh? Well, get the combination from him and then open the safe. And don't get any funny ideas. I'll be right behind you." The knife wiggled a bit.

"Don't," Raleigh gurgled. "It tickles. I'll do it."

"Now!"

"Y—yes. Now."

"Well, what in hell are you waiting for?"

Raleigh got up and went to the door. The key flashed into the lock and turned. He sighed and reached for the handle . . .

A fine thing. At his heels was an invisible murderer. And one almost hysterical with fear, seemingly. Raleigh knew he was walking on quicksand. He dared not try to enlist aid. If he gave Brant the slightest reason for suspicion, it would be just too bad.

He'd have to wait his chance. Once he got inside the jail, to see Meek, things would be different. Surrounded by steel bars, the crook would be under a handicap.

Where was Angel? Raleigh whistled almost inaudibly, but there was no response. Probably the dog was still in the crook's room.

"Shut up," said a low voice.

"I was just—"

"Shut up and keep moving. Get a taxi."

Raleigh signalled for one. He got in, and the driver reached around and slammed the door. There was a muffled cry of pain, and Raleigh felt a body fall heavily against him. Profanity sizzled.

"Sorry, Mister," said the driver, turning a puzzled face. "Did I catch you in the door? I coulda sworn—"

"It's all right," Raleigh interrupted hastily. "The city jail. Hurry."

CHAPTER IV

Angel Gabriel

THE desk sergeant said Raleigh couldn't see Dr. Meek. Not yet, anyway. Then he turned away to glare at a small, wizened safe-cracker with a pious expression.

"The angels told me to bust that box," said the little man, apparently continuing with a long and lying story.

"Preacher Ben's a good name for you," the sergeant growled. "Angels—ha! You'll have plenty of time to see angels in the big house."

He swung on the protesting Raleigh.

"I said 'no!' Get the hell out! You can see Meek tomorrow, maybe. Now scram."

Raleigh felt an invisible hand nudge him away. He was thinking desperately. He had to see the scientist—there was no time to waste. At any moment Brant's over-tense nerves might snap under the strain, and then murder would result. But how—

Suddenly Raleigh remembered the two vials of invisibility elixir he had slipped into his pocket before leaving Meek's home. Surreptitiously he felt for them. They were still there. His heart leaped exultantly.

A perfect hiding place from Brant! He'd make himself invisible; and then, in safety, he could slip into the jail and see Meek. After that, some plan could be worked out. But first of all, he had to escape from the murderous bank robber.

How could he manage to swallow the elixir unobserved?

There was a water cooler in the corner. Gingerly Raleigh walked toward it. His hand, hidden in his coat pocket, uncapped one of the vials. Palming the

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tiny tube, he took a paper cup from the container and filled it with water. Deftly he let the elixir spill into the cup.

No sound came from Brant. Had he noticed the stratagem?

Raleigh swallowed the water at a gulp. The familiar burning sensation raced down his gullet. Simultaneously he jumped aside, whirling.

The little safe-cracker before the bench let out a shrill cry.

"That guy! He's an angel! Now he's gone!"

For a second the sergeant's face was blank as he followed the prisoner's gesture. Then it cleared.

"Nuts," he remarked. "He just walked out. Now—"

"You dirty double-crossing rat!" said a high-pitched voice. "I'll cut off your ears and make you eat 'em!"

"Who said that?" the sergeant bellowed.

"Angels," the safe-cracker explained helpfully.

Raleigh ignored the invisible Brant's threat. The bank robber had realized the trick, but too late to do anything about it. Invisible, he couldn't find another invisible man. Unless, Raleigh thought with a shudder, he used Angel, who was still locked up in Brant's room.

Well, it was necessary to work fast. Raleigh waited till the inner door was opened, and then slipped through. Quietly he made his way to the cell block.

It didn't take him long to find Meek, who was sitting on the edge of his bunk, methodically ripping newspapers into tiny fragments. The scientist didn't look well in prison garments. The gleam in his eye was reptilian.

"Dr. Meek," Raleigh called softly.

The prisoner looked up, frowned, and went back to his paper-tearing.

"Doc! It's me—Raleigh. I'm invisible."

THAT interested Meek. His jaw dropped. He sprang up, went to the bars and stared through.

"Raleigh? What—"

"Sh-h! If they hear us . . . Listen." Swiftly he outlined what had happened.

"That's the set-up," Raleigh finished. "Now, for God's sake, give me the combination of the safe so I can get the antidote."

But Meek hesitated. "Wait a minute. You've still got a vial of the elixir on you?"

"Sure."

"I've a better idea. Give it to me. If I'm invisible, I can get out of here."

Raleigh fumbled in his unseen pocket and brought out the vial. Held within his palm, it was invisible. He dropped it, as he thought, into Meek's outstretched hand.

Cr-rack! Glass shattered on the cement floor.

"You bungling idiot!" Meek howled. "You did that on purpose!"

Raleigh gurgled helplessly. He made futile groping motions.

The scientist calmed down—like a Gila monster.

"You think I'm safer in jail, eh? I never trusted you, Raleigh! Now—"

"There's more of the elixir in the safe," Raleigh suggested. "Give me the combination, quick, I'll bring you another vial."

Meek breathed audibly. "And meanwhile this crook—Brant—will be invisibly snatching some of the antidote over your shoulder. Uh-huh. Once he's visible again, he can escape for good and all—and I'll stay here and rot. And that'll be all right with you."

The scientist's voice rose to a scream of fury.

"Like hell! You'll stay invisible till you get me out of this!"

There was little point in remaining, especially since guards were appearing

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from all directions. Raleigh returned to the room where he had left Brant. The desk sergeant and the safe-cracker were still arguing fruitlessly about angels. There was only one other person in the room, a uniformed patrolman—unless Brant was present.

"The angels told me to do it," the prisoner contended. "I can open any safe in the world if they—"

"What?" The exclamation was ripped involuntarily from Raleigh's lips.

"Who said that?" the sergeant roared.

"Angels," the prisoner remarked.

Raleigh sent a swift glance at the outer, swinging door. Beyond it was the street. If he could somehow manage to abduct the prisoner—the safe might be opened!

But how could he kidnap a man from the stronghold of the law?

Raleigh stealthily neared the patrolman, who was sitting in a corner, blinking. A stolid individual, yet perhaps with some imagination. It would help. Raleigh put his mouth close to the man's ear and whispered softly,

"You're going to die!"

RESULTS were more than satisfactory. The officer turned yellow and shook in every limb. He swiveled around, saw nothing behind him and began to gurgle.

Raleigh laughed nastily. "Down you come to hell with me," he whispered.

The invitation proved unacceptable. At any rate, the policeman fainted, slipping down noiselessly under the row of chairs. His absence went unnoticed.

That left the sergeant, a somewhat tougher egg. Raleigh slipped up behind the man's chair. Deftly he put his hands about the sergeant's throat and squeezed, not much. Nothing happened.

The officer remained perfectly motionless, except that he stopped talking. Dead silence fell over the room.

It grew strained. Raleigh withdrew his hands. The sergeant suddenly unbuttoned his collar. He looked fixedly at his prisoner and licked dry lips.

The invisible man began to pat the sergeant's cheeks with his palms. Under certain circumstances, this gesture may prove pleasant—even a caress. Always assuming that the hands are . . . visible.

Raleigh put his palms over the sergeant's eyes. Naturally, this didn't obscure the latter's vision in the least. But when a gloating voice whispered, "Guess who!" the officer's nerves crumbled with an almost audible crash.

Shrieking, the sergeant rose and fled.

"Angels," said the safe-cracker, with satisfaction.

Raleigh didn't care whether he was nuts or not, as long as he could open safes. With one bound he leaped over the desk, seized the prisoner by neck and pants and propelled him through the door. Before the startled crook could protest, he found himself in a taxi headed uptown.

Then Raleigh settled himself for the hysterical outburst he expected. He'd have to calm the little outlaw—explain to him, somehow, the circumstances. What had the sergeant called him?

"Preacher Ben," Raleigh said gently.

Ben's wrinkled face twisted in a smile.

"Hello, Gabriel," he beamed. "I expected you."

"But—hold on, pal. I'm not the angel Gabriel—"

At this moment a truck rushed precariously past the front bumpers, and the driver pressed the horn button. A hoarse blast sounded.

This occurrence confirmed Ben's suspicion.

"Horn and all," he nodded. "Good old Gabriel. Where are we going?"

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Raleigh almost swore with irritation, but somehow he felt that it would be a mistake to say "Hell!" at this particular moment. Instead, he murmured,

"I want you to open a safe for me."

Ben didn't seem surprised. "All right, Gabe. Do you mind me calling you Gabe? I feel like we're old friends, somehow."

"That's fine," Raleigh said, swallowing convulsively. "But about this safe—"

"Oh, I'll need tools. The police took mine away. But I can get them."

"How long will it take?"

"I dunno. Couple of hours, maybe."

"Swell," said Raleigh. "Here's the angle. I want you to fake a robbery. I'll show you where. I want you to open the safe and leave it open. Don't take anything. There's no money in it anyway. Got that?"

"Sure," said Preacher Ben. "Anything you say, Gabe."

CHAPTER V

Defiance

AFTER that things happened fast—but not fast enough. It took a long time to get the necessary articles for Ben. For some reason the stethoscope was the most difficult to secure. The job was finished at last, by noon the next day.

Raleigh slipped unnoticed into the house and found Binnie, telling her of the plan.

"Brant's watching this place, I'm sure," he said. "He knows I'll need the antidote for myself, and he expects your father gave me the combination to the safe. After Ben leaves, Brant will see the safe's open. Be sure and don't draw the curtains in the office."

"Dad's in court today," Binnie said sadly. "A preliminary hearing or something. I've got to go down and see what happens."

Something brushed up against Raleigh's leg. He jumped before hearing a familiar whine.

"Angel!" he said.

"Oh, yes. She came back."

The dog must have got out of Brant's room, then. Well, that helped.

Binnie left. Raleigh went into the office and waited. He glanced occasionally at the window, but saw nothing. Yet he felt sure that Brant was watching the house, which contained the crook's only means of salvation.

Glass tinkled from a distance. Raleigh flattened himself against the wall and waited. The door was swinging open . . .

Preacher Ben walked in, smiling. His eyes lighted as he saw the safe. Without wasting a moment he came forward, opening a black bag he held.

He knelt and extracted a stethoscope which he clamped in his ears. Ten minutes later the door of the safe swung outward.

Obediently Preacher Ben reached in and pretended to pick up various nonexistent objects. That was for Brant's benefit, if the crook were watching. Actually, Ben touched none of the dozens of little vials that lay scattered on the floor of the safe—which was otherwise empty.

"Wait a minute," Raleigh whispered, and was busy carrying out a certain plan he had worked out in detail previously. At last he stepped back and breathed,

"Now. Shut it."

Ben closed the door, but didn't lock the safe. He got up and left the room, and after that the house. He did not reappear, but it is presumed that his after-life was gladdened by his one encounter with the angel Gabriel.

Meanwhile Raleigh waited. Ben had

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left the door ajar, unfortunately, but the chance of closing it could not be taken now. Brant might already be invisibly in the room.

If he got away now with the antidote . . .

Raleigh felt in his pocket for the handful of vials he had put there after the safe had been opened. That was okay. Well . . .

He wondered how Binnie was getting on. She was in court now, watching her father. Raleigh hoped the old coot was squirming.

He glanced sharply at the door. Had it moved, very slightly? Had Brant arrived? There was no way of telling. And Brant was—armed!

IF the crook slipped from Raleigh's grasp, got out of the house with the antidote, it would be impossible to find him again.

Slowly the door of the safe opened. Simultaneously Raleigh snapped,

"Sic him! Get him, Angel!"

He dived for the door as a gun blasted, ripping plaster from the wall, just behind where he had been standing.

Raleigh crouched on the threshold like a wrestler. There were noises coming from the safe, in the interior of which he had left Angel. Invisible man and invisible dog were having a disagreement. Suddenly a heavy weight cannoned into Raleigh, catching him by surprise despite himself.

There was an oath in Brant's high-pitched voice. Something exploded under Raleigh's chin, and he was flung back. A lucky blow—but it worked.

Brant tore free. His footsteps thudded across the carpet. The outer door was ripped open.

Sick with the realization of failure, Raleigh raced after the escaping crook. He burst out in the blazing sunlight of the street and stood looking around helplessly. Where was the invisible man?

Gone! Gone without a trace, amid the throngs on the sidewalk. The street was crowded at this hour.

Raleigh's stomach took an elevator dive. Then it halted as a familiar sound came to his ears. Angel was barking.

Heads were turning as the disembodied barks raced past. The dog, using his nose rather than his eyes, was pursuing Brant!

Raleigh sprinted after the sound. People went spinning as he tore into them. Cries of amazement and terror rose. A car swerved to the curb with a squealing of breaks.

"What's wrong?"

"Something hit me!"

A voice shouted, "That's Dr. Meek's house! The invisible man!"

"The invisible man!"

Through the tumult shrilled Angel's frantic barks. Raleigh plunged desperately in pursuit. Ignoring the red light at the corner, he darted into a stream of traffic. Not a car slowed. Their drivers saw nothing!

"The invisible man!"

The barks were louder. Raleigh heard a scuffle, saw a man topple sideward, yelling. Angel's cries were suddenly muffled.

A knife materialized out of thin air, clattering on the cement. Raleigh dived, kicking the weapon aside as he smashed into a bulky, unseen body. Brant screamed an oath. A gun barked, the bullet breaking a plate-glass window nearby.

Angel's teeth snapped. Raleigh tried to locate the gun amid a squirming mass of invisible arms and legs. Then he saw it, a few feet away, out of reach.

ANGEL saw it too. The misguided dog freed himself and rushed over

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to the weapon, seizing it in his jaws. He brought it back.

Both men snatched for the gun at the same moment. Angel, always ready to play, danced back out of reach. The legs of the surrounding mob swallowed her. Somebody fell over Raleigh and rolled away, yelling.

Brant's fingers were feeling for his attacker's eyes. Raleigh tried to get hold of Brant's throat. He grabbed the man's ears, instead. Since the crook was underneath, Raleigh began to bang Brant's head against the sidewalk.

After that, the fight was over.

Raleigh got up dazedly, keeping his hand on his captive's coat collar. The crowd was growing. If he drank the antidote now, it would mean long explanations . . .

Angel barked. Raleigh said, "Sic 'em, Angel! Go get 'em."

Frantic with valor, the dog obeyed. The crowd broke up into a riot. Invisible teeth were everywhere, nipping sharply. Raleigh slung Brant over his shoulder and departed.

He found a taxi, but hesitated. The driver would balk at invisible passengers. But luckily the man was in a nearby doorway, conversing with friends. Raleigh slung Brant's unconscious form into the cab, clambered under the steering wheel and started the car, heedless of the driver's sudden outcry.

Thus a "driverless" taxicab moved rapidly along the street, to the shocked alarm of many.

Sirens began to scream. Motorcycles pursued. As the cab halted outside the city hall, officers surrounded it.

"It's empty!" said one.

And it was. Raleigh was already inside the building, carrying Brant.

He tried several court rooms before finding the right one, which was packed due to the sensational nature of the case. Meek was on the stand, his round face choleric with rage at the questioning he had been undergoing. The judge, a skinny, bald old vulture, was peering through thick-lensed glasses and toying with his gavel.

The guard at the door was sent staggering aside. Raleigh sprinted down the aisle, halting only when he stood before the bench.

"Your Honor—" he began.

"Silence in the court!" the judge snapped, using his gavel. But Meek's eyes were glistening.

He sprang to his feet. "Rick! Is that you?"

"Silence!"

The scientist thrust out an imploring hand.

"Wait, your Honor. My assistant's here."

"Where?"

"He's invisible," said Meek.

The judge poured water from a pitcher and drank it hastily.

"This—this is most irregular—"

He stopped. Beneath him, on the floor, a man was becoming visible.

He was a short, squat fellow, with a drooping eyelid and a day's growth of black beard. He was unconscious.

"I poured the antidote down his throat," a voice from empty air explained. "Now I'll take some myself."

RICHARD RALEIGH reappeared, slightly battered, but grinning.

The judge drank more water. He said,

"So. It's true. Not just publicity. I'll be damned—*silence in the court!*" The gavel could not hush the rising tumult.

Brant was stirring. Officers sprang forward to seize him. Raleigh explained to the judge,

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"That's the real bank robber, your Honor. He—"

"Money!" one of the policemen said. "His pockets are stuffed with it!"

The judge used his gavel again. "Calm down, please. You—" He pointed at Raleigh. "Take the stand. I want to ask you some questions . . ."

The questions were answered, though Raleigh could not keep his eyes off Binnie, who sat in the front row, looking more than ever like an angel. He scarcely realized it when the judge had finished and he was requested to step down.

Reporters were fleeing excitedly.

"Meek's name cleared! And Brant's got a record! What a scoop!"

Amid the commotion, Raleigh seized Binnie's hand and found Dr. Meek. The scientist was beaming in triumph. He even smiled at his assistant.

"Well, well. Thank you, Raleigh." Suddenly the blue eyes went reptilian. *"What d'you want?"*

"I want to marry Binnie—"

The chandelier rocked. Dr. Meek had said "no" that emphatically.

Raleigh looked swiftly at the girl, who nodded. Two hands lifted as one. And—quite suddenly and unexpectedly—Binnie Meek and Richard Raleigh disappeared.

"Come back here!" the doctor yelled. He turned toward the bench. "Your Honor, I appeal—"

The judge was lifting his water glass to his lips. He did not notice a small vial hanging in empty air, emptying its contents into the water. He drank long and thirstily . . .

"Gosh!" said an awed voice. "Now the judge is gone too!"

It was a scene long remembered in the annals of the law. Newspapers featured it that night. Riot was an underestimate. Through the confusion Meek ploughed like a spitting cobra, his wild gaze vainly searching for people who weren't there any more.

"Where are they?" he shouted. "Where's my daughter? Where's that double-crossing assistant of mine?"

"Where's the judge?" asked a baffled clerk.

There was a lull in the noisy confusion. And it was at this point that practically everybody in the court room heard, from a distant corner, a disembodied voice which said benignly:

". . . I now pronounce you man and wife."

It was due to Dr. Meek's unrestrained remarks at that moment that he was subsequently fined fifty dollars for contempt of court.

COMING IN THE SEPTEMBER AMAZING STORIES: The unusual climax of "Orn," Piers Anthony's epic novel of a world sideslipped in time, plus "The Oogenesis of Bird City," Philip Jose Farmer's sequel to "Riders of the Purple Wage"—and, "The Low Road" by Christopher Anvil and "Dry Spell" by Bill Prozini!

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TREATY

by LINCOLN ALBERT

Lincoln Albert is a new name to these pages, and one may legitimately wonder if it is one you'll see here again. But one of the co-authors of this brief story didn't want his name used, and the other refused solo credit. All of which does not in the least reflect upon the quality of the story, which manages to turn a new leaf in a rather old book . . .

MICHAEL EVANS was World President, but he knew when he was in over his depth.

"I think we've reached agreement on just about all the major points at issue," he said. He was going to play this one carefully. His face was creased in the confident, manly smile he normally saved for campaign speeches.

The chief of the Talathian delegation, thin but humanoid, straightened his notes and looked across at Evans.

"I suppose we're each as inexperienced in this as the other," he said urbanely, "so I would recommend that we confine ourselves to essentials."

Evans nodded and smiled a little too broadly. "A very good idea, Mr. Sorket, very good indeed."

He permitted himself to sit back a trifle in his chair. Encircling the two negotiators' table sat rows of aides and subordinates, human and Talathian as well. A few talked in hushed tones, so that a low murmur of conversation hung in the frigid air of the conference room.

Evans wished for the tenth time that newsmen could be present. Decisions made behind closed doors were difficult to sell to the people, especially in an election year. But the military advised against open discussions, and the Talathians had not insisted.

"You have investigated some of the devices we gave you?" the Talathian inquired.

"They certainly lived up to your claims," Evans said. "The short range teleportation system functions beautifully. My aides tell me the theoretical basis of it is well known to us. A modified form of charge-parity-time invariance, as they call it. Just words to me, I'm afraid." He made a self-effacing grin, saw that it had not registered with the stony alien, and hurried on.

"Our physicists overlooked the application, somehow, until you dropped it in our laps. The ion drive, however, is

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far beyond us."

"I am happy you found them satisfactory."

Evans nodded again. He was sweating a little, though the room was air conditioned against the heat outside. Through a window he could see the rosy horizon of a late summer sunset. "And since these were only tokens of what you can really do, well—"

"Your people will not mind giving up the land we requested, then?"

"No. I figure I can work that all out." *No one minded,* he thought, *except the Saudi Arabian government. And the Australians.* "It's very good of you to ask only for land we can't use ourselves."

The alien spread his bony arms in a gesture common to both races. "We do not wish to inconvenience you any more than we must. There are only a few million of us. We should not find it difficult to convert deserts and the icy wastes near the poles to fertile land. Of course, agriculture in those regions cannot provide every food product we need, and our people will depend on yours for that."

As he listened, Evans considered the way he would phrase his announcement. The aliens had been on Earth two weeks, but already people were recovering from the shock and adjusting. The press was foaming at the mouth for details.

And burrowed away in their private apartments or estates, the men Evans really cared about were asking the only question that really counts: *What's in it for me?*

The transport interests were worried sick about teleportation, and the space industry was looking at their latest rocket like it was a pile of worthless junk. Probably was, at that.

When he got in front of the cameras it would probably be best to play down the economic dislocations and pump for the humane aspects. *We extend, the hand of friendship to these refugees from the stars,* or something similar.

Sorket was looking at him closely. "Your race realizes that ours is moving permanently? That we will need homes and clothes and food? That we will place great demands on your energy?"

"Whatever we have is now yours also," Evans said. This was no time to quibble.

"We shall take you at your word. You are a most generous people."

Evans hesitated a second. A politician grows used to making expansive promises, but these were special circumstances. Who knows what the aliens would think he meant? But it was too late now; the pact was made, and too many factions were ready to join in pushing him out of office if he hesitated or had second thoughts.

He realized it wouldn't look well if the final negotiations took only a few minutes. *The average Joe expects politicians to talk for hours. That's what we're paid for.* Best to stretch it out.

"Are you quite sure you'll be able to adjust to the climate?"

The alien smiled with bloodless lips. "I must say I've never seen a sun as bright as yours." He turned toward the broad window that dominated one wall of the conference room and shielded his deep-set eyes with an arm. "Almost intolerable. But that is natural—our star was burning out, and the dust cloud enveloping it made our world uninhabitable. I am afraid we will have to stay indoors here during most of the day, or all suffer sunburn in due course."

"You remember that world yourself?" Evans asked in surprise. "I thought your ships had been in space for centuries."

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"That is correct. Our race has the natural ability to undergo a kind of suspended animation for indefinitely long periods of time. Since our departure, most of our time has been spent lying dormant in sealed cases."

"Did you know where you were going?"

"No, we traveled without a chosen destination. Our only plan was to go on until we found a suitable planet. Our pilots had almost given up hope of finding one like yours, in a young system with so suitable an ecology. What would have happened to us if our search had not ended when it did, I cannot say." He traced long fingers across the dry, lizard-like skin of his forearm.

"How did you find us?"

"Approximately 300 Earth years ago, one of our scout ships discovered your solar system. It set down on Earth in a fairly inaccessible region, amid a range of mountains. The members of that expedition spent several years conducting an intensive ecological study of conditions here. They were very thorough. They even made contact with some of your species before returning to inform us of their discovery."

"Your race met ours three centuries ago? But we have no record of such an encounter," said Evans.

"Apparently none has survived. The natives there were peasants. Perhaps their reports were ignored. And it has been a long time."

"It is a marvel to think what you have had to endure," said Evans. "Three hundred years just to reach this system." He eyed the alien's slight birdlike form. For someone negotiating for a planet, Sorket was remarkably unimpressive. Dressed in a single blue garment, his gaunt bones stood out. But in more conventional clothing he could have strolled the streets anywhere on Earth without attracting more than the usual indifference of city dwellers.

Sorket said, "Perhaps you overestimate the severity of the hardships we have lived through. Long ago, our scientists were able to build systems which protected us from the worst extremes of climate and radiation produced by our dying sun. But they could do little to save other life forms on our world. When these began to fail, our own world was no longer hospitable to us. We adapted our bodies in an effort to adjust to the new conditions. For example, these," he said, indicating two winglike structures growing out of his shoulderblades, "can be outstretched to serve as insulators or collectors of heat. We did not always have them."

"But you lost the struggle," Evans said, leading him on. This would all be good background material for the press conference. The networks would lap it up.

"Yes, in the end we were defeated. All the plants and animals with which we had been in a symbiotic relationship perished, and our native planet became utterly hostile to us—quite unlike your world," he added.

The alien paused, leaving a silence that the World President found uncomfortable. At length Evans cleared his throat. "I think it's time to make a public announcement of our agreement. The gentlemen outside will want to hear what we've accomplished."

He rose and offered his hand. Sorket took it somewhat awkwardly and said goodbye. Standing, he looked pale and weak.

"Let me invite you and your staff to be my guests at the Presidential Palace while you are staying in Washington, Mr. Sorket. My wife and I would be very

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 75)

Head erect, like a proud and melancholy prince, Riker turned to stride across the room and place the naked dagger on the end table. Then wearily seating himself on the edge of the bed, he said, "Leave me now, old friend. Let me rest."

Kyning walked to the door. His hand still trembled as he opened it and stepped out. He paused in the hallway and wiped at his still-damp face. Thoughts writhed through his mind like blind maggots.

This was madness. The whole damned dream of revolution was and it had pulled Riker into its vortex. Yet it *could* succeed. It had to succeed.

Maybe once it had—once this preliminary pressure was off—Riker would come to his senses again. But maybe not—and then what?

Find out *then,* he told himself. Take it as it comes. There's too much at stake to chuck it all because of what might be a simple temporary aberration on Riker's part. Too much to lose.

He looked down at his unsteady hands. It was more than simple physical shock, he admitted slowly. There was fear in it too—a stark and horrible fear of having this dream crumble away too. It seemed like the last—the only—chance. Lose it and look forward to a life of wandering through the gutters of miserable backwater planets, grubbing for money enough to buy Kalvaran enough . . .

"And I am Sancho to a fool, In hopes a golden isle to rule," he mumbled softly as he began walking again, through the hallway and out of the building.

The shadows he stepped into were long and the rising twilight breeze was cool against his face. His skin tingled, still a little sensitive from that sudden shock of hot coffee.

He kept walking, drifting without direction and paying no attention to where he wandered until he realized broken battlements were rearing themselves before him, black against the aurora of the evening sky. Beyond the rising walls, the silhouetted spires of the spaceport twinkled with fresh-lit lamps. He'd come to the place where the tiltyard had been—to the building that was sprouting from the ground he'd spilled his blood into.

But this ragged-edged structure before him was no fallen castle filled with the ghosts of dreams. It was only an unfinished building. And those were no sparks of faery light, but only the lamps of the spaceport. The ground that had drunk of his blood wasn't a field of honor—just an arena for a play long done and forgotten.

And somewhere among all the lost dreams, Janneth too had been forgotten. His promise to her was gone to dust with the rest.

He stepped through a gaping hole that would someday become a doorway, into the dark hollows of the rising building. There was no longer dirt underfoot, but a hard smooth surface of poured plastic that covered any lingering stains of his spilled blood.

What was this building to become, he wondered. He realized he'd never thought of it that way before—never as a growing edifice reaching toward a future. He asked himself why *he* wandered among the decayed walls of fallen castles while other men erected new structures to new purposes. Why did he see ruins where others saw growth?

There was no wind here within the walls. The warmth of the day lingered. Wearily, he seated himself on the floor, leaning his shoulders against the wall. He was tired—damnably tired. He folded his

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arms across his knees and let his head slump to rest on them.

There was a ghost that walked the battlements and cried out for blood. It screamed its agony in the whisperings of the wind, a silver-hilted dagger held out before its hollow eyes.

Or was it only a dream? He looked up, blinking against the sleep that was still in his eyes. He'd dozed off and it was only a dream, he told himself. But a cold and ugly one, as cold as the stars that hung against a night-black sky beyond that lidless eye of a doorway. Was one of those ice-crystal specks Sol?

He saw the ghost. It was a murmur of sight—a pale phantom glimmering in the starlight. No—not a ghost—but a faery maiden strolling through the glade. Startled, he got to his feet and called out, "Dulcinea!"

She paused and turned to scan the dark walls. Softly she asked the shadows, "Kyn?"

He stepped into the starlight. "Here," he said.

She came toward him, asking, "What is it, Kyn? What's the matter?"

He reached for the hand she held out to him. "I'm lost. Lead me."

"Where?"

"Somewhere—anywhere away from here."

Her hand was warm in his, comforting in its clasp. Again, she said, "What's the matter?"

The compulsion to talk it all out was stronger than his apprehension of her response. He told her what had happened—about Janneth and about Riker. And when he'd said it all, he waited, mustering arguments against going to the Adstrators and warning them about the revolution. But, to his surprise, she didn't suggest that again.

Instead, she said, "I think we'd better go see Janneth. She'd just come home when I left. She should be there now."

Facing the girl again would be a damned unpleasant task. But it had to be done, he told himself. Silently he walked along at Dulcinea's side.

This was the first time he'd ever gone into the building with her. It was almost identical with the one where he and Riker lived. But yet he felt oddly misplaced and uncomfortable as he stepped into the elevator with her, almost as if he were entering some sacred precinct—as if he needed to undergo some purification rite before entering here.

The elevator let them into a corridor that was as dim-lit and silent as a chapel. Even on the cushioned floor, their footsteps sounded unnaturally loud.

She led him to a door and opened it onto a darkened room. Softly, she called, "Janneth?"

There was no answer. Turning to Kyning, she whispered, "She may be asleep."

He nodded, but the instant of relief he felt was gone almost as quickly as he could recognize it. He *had* to face Janneth.

Dulcinea called again. And this time there was an answer. A thin soblike murmur replied in question, "Neffa?"

"Yes, are you awake? Kyn is with me."

"Kyning?" the voice from the dark said hoarsely. He thought he heard an edge of fear in it.

He asked, "Jan, are you alright?"

As if in reply, the bedlamp blinked on, spilling a small pool of light over the open bed and the girl who lay on it. She was fully dressed, sprawled over the covers. As she looked toward the doorway, the light washed over her face. It was distorted, puffy with reddened tear-swollen eyes. A

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broad purpling bruise discolored one cheek.

"Janneth!" Dulcinea hurried toward her.

With a bone-deep reluctance, Kyning followed. He was beginning to feel a sick suspicion of what had happened. Hesitantly, he asked, "Riker?"

She nodded. "He came here. He—he—" Her voice trailed off into feeble, exhausted sobbing. She dropped her head back to the pillow and pressed her hands to her face.

"Get me a wet towel," Dulcinea said.

He went to the wall kitchen, tore a towel from the roller and dampened it, then handed it to Dulcinea.

She coaxed Janneth into lifting her head again, and daubed at her face with it.

"You got anything to drink around here?" he asked.

"Only tea," she said absently.

He rummaged through the cabinets until he found the tea tablets, then made a cup of it and took it to her. She held it for Janneth to sip. It seemed to help.

After a moment Janneth took a deep breath, her sobbing calmed now. "He came here," she said. "He hit me. He kept hitting me—and laughing. At first he was so angry—but when he started to hit me he began to laugh."

"He's crazy," Kyning mumbled.

She was struggling to keep from crying again. "He told me I'd done wrong talking to you. He told me I belonged to him to do with as he pleased. He—he—*you* did this to him, Kyning! He was alright before. He was nice and kind but—but he's changed so. *You* did it. *You* changed him!"

He winced at the accusation—at the sharp barb of truth he felt in it.

Dulcinea was looking at him. For an answer? For a confession?

"Okay, maybe I started it," he admitted. It was damned hard to say. "But the direction he went in—that's *his* doing, not mine!"

"Will it be that way with all of us, Kyn?" Dulcinea asked.

"No! Hell, I don't know!"

Her eyes on him were wide and solemn. Her gaze cut deep.

"All his life Riker's been a fetus in the drug-warped womb of this idiotic Elvan society," he said. "He broke loose—was born—suddenly. He's trying to grow up in a matter of weeks instead of years. Right now he's a damned arrogant power-crazy child. He'll grow out of it. He'll be okay!"

He paused, wishing to hell he could completely believe what he was saying. "Look, what about you? You've kicked aqapa. You've been reading literature. You've been exposed to the same influences as Riker—to me. What's it like for you?"

"It's not easy," she answered. "It's all being twisted and uncertain inside. It's all confused."

"Do you want it to be the way it used to? You want to go back to life the way it was before? Go ahead! Go back to slugging down the aqapa. It'll calm your worries and quench your instincts. You can recapture what you had before if you want to."

"No, that's not what I want. That's wrong. It's inhuman," she said.

"Then what the hell do you want?"

"The revolution, but the way it was planned in the beginning—not with bloodshed and not with a dictator. We want a chance to make our own lives. We don't want the computers to be our masters. But we don't want Riker as a master either. Whatever's happened to him, Kyn, it's wrong. He's not the one to lead us now—not the way he's become.

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Not if he can do things like this," she gestured toward Janneth.

He turned away. With weary slowness, he walked to the sink and punched for cold water. He rubbed his hands under it, then wiped at his face. When he turned again, he didn't look at her. Not until he reached the door.

He faced her then, pausing with his hand on the knob.

"It's *my* dream, too," he said.

She nodded. "I know."

CHAPTER 11

IT SEEMED a long way back to Riker's apartment—an eternity of thinking. Kyning realized that he was walking slowly, stalling off the moment. He cursed himself for it. He cursed himself for everything, especially the madness of building dreams.

When he faced the closed door of the room, he found himself hesitating again. With another silent curse he forced himself to try the knob. It turned freely. With quiet caution, he edged open the door.

Only a thin spill of starlight through the translucent windows gave form to the blanket-wrapped figure on the bed.

As he closed the door behind him, Kyning glanced at the end table. The dagger still lay there, the silver of its hilt catching faint shape from the pale light. He wrapped his hand around it. There was something reassuring in the familiar feel of it nestled into his palm.

Moving silently, he crossed to the open wall kitchen, took down a cup and filled it with ice-cold water. The sleeping figure stirred restlessly, startling him for an instant. But the even rhythm of sleep-drawn breath held steady.

He turned back toward the bed. Almost gently he laid the sharp-honed edge of the blade against Riker's exposed throat, then uptilted the ice-water into his face.

Riker gasped with shock and started to sit up. The pressure of the blade held him back. And Kyning dropped the cup to catch one flailing arm. He pinned the other with a knee, pressing it into the mattress.

Riker struggled a moment, then froze as he came awake enough to understand his position. Voicelessly, he rasped, "Wha—Kyn!"

Kyning nodded. His own voice was soft and steady as he said, "You're crazy, Riker. I should slit your damned throat."

He had thought about it. He had considered letting Riker waken enough to know what was happening and then slicing vein-deep with the dagger and letting the insane corruption spurt itself out of Riker's husk. He'd thought of absolving his own guilt in Riker's blood.

He wasn't sure now what stayed his hand—conscience or cowardice. Was the inability to kill this way a virtue of humanity—or a weakness? He didn't know. But whatever it was, it held him back from the clean, cold murder he had contemplated.

Riker didn't know that thought.

"Please, Kyn! No!" he pleaded.

"You're a damned rotten carcass," Kyning said. It took no effort to hold his voice calmly level. The guilt was his own as well as Riker's. He'd had the idiotic gall to tamper with other lives when he knew damned well he wasn't capable of handling his own life. He spoke as to a mirror.

"You're rotten. You're a vile filth. You're a maggot—a cancer on the skin of

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this planet. You need to be amputated. The stench of you sickens me . . ."

"No!" Riker squealed. "Please, Kyn—anything—I'll do anything you ask—I'll pay you!"

"Your money stinks as much as you do."

"Anything!"

"Everything," Kyning said. "You'll give up this whole scheme of armed revolution. You'll disband the army—tell them it was all a mistake. You'll leave Elva. You can find a way off. See that smuggler friend of yours or something. But you'll get off this planet . . ."

"Yes! Whatever you say, but—please—the knife!"

"You're going to some place that can cope with your damned contamination," he continued, thinking that he, too, would get offplanet somehow, as quickly as he could. Take his own contagious madness somewhere else.

"Yes! Yes!" Riker groaned.

Kyning eased back the blade. He rose, freeing Riker's arms. And Riker lay deathly still, limp in his own cold sweat.

Kyning stood, knowing he was silhouetted against the windows. He added, "Try to cross me and I'll mince your lights. I'll spill your stinking brains out through your eyesockets. I'll skewer your liver . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes . . ."

"On your oath. Swear it on your honor, on your sword."

"I swear!"

He gazed at the huddled figure a moment longer, wondering. It would have been better to kill and be certain. But his hands—his nerve—something—had failed him. He *had* to accept Riker's word.

He walked out, slamming the door behind him. With the unblooded knife under his belt, he headed back to Dulcinea's.

Her door was bolted. He tapped the buzzer plate and waited. After a moment, her voice came softly.

"Who's there?"

"Kyning."

She flung open the door and threw her arms around his neck. "Oh Kyn! What happened?"

He kissed her gently, feeling even that was wrong and evil. Stepping inside, he said, "Nothing much. I took back my dagger. And Riker promised to forget the revolution. He's leaving Elva. How's Janneth?"

"I'm alright," the girl answered for herself. She was sitting up on the bed, pressing a cold cloth to her cheek. Her eyes were clearer now, and her voice steady.

"I'm sorry about the things I said, Kyn. It isn't your fault."

He shook his head. "It'll be okay now. Look, shouldn't you go to a hospital?"

"No," she said. "I'd rather not."

"They can radiate down that bruise and stop the pain."

"I don't want to. I'll be alright."

Accepting her decision, he turned away. As he drew the dagger from his belt he felt suddenly astonished that it could have become so much more than a relic and a stage prop. It was a *weapon*—a functional and potentially deadly weapon, a vital factor in the struggle for an entire planet's future.

Feeling vaguely ridiculous and melodramatic, he set it down on the table and turned his back to it.

"Did you hurt him?" Dulcinea asked.

"No, but I scared hell out of him. I think he's tamed now."

"And the revolution?"

"We'll do it your way," he said. "We

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can go to see Adstrator Gorman in the morning. We can tell him everything."

She smiled and reached for his hand. As she took it, he realized it was trembling again. He mumbled, "I need a drink."

"I'll fix some tea," she said.

It was a damned poor substitute for Kalvaran, he thought. But it was better than nothing.

Dulcinea set up three cups and for a while they all sat together making very small conversation. It was meant to distract Janneth and as her tension eased, the adrenalin of shock wore away. Exhaustion began to show itself. Leaning her head back, she closed her eyes and in a few moments had drifted into sleep.

As Kyning got to his feet, he whispered to Dulcinea, "You'd better get some rest yourself, if we're going to see Gorman in the morning."

"You're not going away, are you, Kyn?"

He looked at her for a long moment, then glanced around the room. "You want me to stay here?"

"You can take my bed," she said, rising. She prodded a stud and the instant bed unfolded itself.

"No. I'll stretch out on the couch."

She smiled at him as she handed him a blanket, and he wondered if she understood. Wearily, he settled himself on the couch. He was glad she'd suggested it. Where the hell could he have gone?

As he opened his eyes he thought that he couldn't have been asleep more than a couple of hours. What was it that had broken his shallow, dream-ridden rest? Frowning at the darkness, he listened intently.

There was a faint sound in the hallway. He decided it warranted investigation and got to his feet. Moving slowly and silently, hoping not to disturb the sleeping girls, he started to reach for the dagger on the table—and wheeled, empty-handed, at the sudden violent crash.

The bolt on the Elvan door was nothing more than a latch. It was no safeguard against force. At the first heavy blow it had yielded. The door slammed open.

Riker stood framed there, sword in hand. Cleb and the three other faithful lieutenants who were behind him had bared their own blades.

"What?" Kyning mumbled, thinking for an instant that this was some vivid dream.

Striding into the room, Riker waved his free hand at the wall switch. As the lights sprung on, he faced Kyning with the sword upheld.

"I thought I might find you here," he said, his voice high-pitched and twisted.

Wakened suddenly, Dulcinea gasped in horror. Riker's eyes darted toward her. And Kyning lunged for the dagger on the table.

But Riker's blade moved too quickly. It touched Kyning's stomach, the razor-honed point piercing through his shirt. It prodded sharply at his flesh.

He froze at the feel of it.

Riker smiled. The muscles of his face drew taut over the bone, his lips baring his teeth. His skin was damp with sweat, shining as if it were oiled.

He gestured and the lieutenants moved at the unspoken command as if they'd already rehearsed their orders. Two of them sheathed their blades and stepped to Kyning's sides. They caught his arms, pinning them.

Riker's smile broadened into a harsh leer as he lifted his sword, sliding its tip in a line too thin and sharp to be painful.

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Slowly, it moved up Kyning's skin to the point of his breast bone.

"I could kill you," Riker said. "But I won't. I won't make it that easy for you."

Kyning glanced at the sword, and at his shirt. He saw the slitted cloth stained with a scant streak of his own blood. As he looked up again, Riker swung the sword, ramming the pommel of it toward his face.

It was a hammer blow that jerked his head back with cracking pain, driving the soft flesh of his mouth onto his teeth. A redness flooded his eyes and a thick hot taste of salt filled his mouth, spilling from its corners. He wrenched futilely against the hands that held him.

Blinking, he focussed on Riker again and tried to make a spoken word of the curse in his mind. But the pain twisted his mouth and blood filled it, stifling the word into a distorted noise.

Riker still grinned. There was a bright sheen of pleasure glistening in his eyes—a savoring of power twisting his mouth—as he sheathed his sword. He pressed his hands together, locking the fingers and stretching one hand against the other, like a pianist flexing before a performance. With a tantalizing slowness, he spread and then fisted them.

Animal delight filled his face as he drove one fist into Kyning's body, just below the ribs.

He had no skill. But he had instincts, freed now from a lifetime of suppression. They rose to guide him—to overwhelm him—as he rammed his knotted hands again and again into Kyning's flesh.

Caught helpless in the hands of the lieutenants, Kyning could only wince at the blows. At first they were spaced with uncertainty and he had instants to draw at breath between them. But then they grew more confident, building with the intensity of Riker's frenzy into a trip-hammer action, driving spikes of pain through him.

He heard Dulcinea's protests and her angry shout as one of Riker's men grabbed and held her. Then he heard only Riker's harsh laughter. And finally all sound merged into a dull thunder that rolled distantly after each lightning stroke of pain through his body.

Awareness became a thin thing—a thread stretched taut, trying again and again to break. But each time a wet chill would splash into his face, shocking him back to knowledge of pain. And new surges of pain would follow.

He wove through darkness and consciousness, knowing for a moment that he was hung suspended in the hands of the others. He knew when the hands loosened their grip to let him fall. There was an instant—or an eternity—of nothing except pain.

And then he was aware of the hard surface of the floor under his hands and against his face. He was aware, without reason, of trying to brace himself with the intention of lifting his head.

Riker's boot caught him in the face.

He slumped, still caught by a tenuous thread of consciousness, but without the strength or will to move again.

The voices were muffled and faint, as if coming from a far distance. The words they formed were barely audible. A frenzied shrieking that might have been Riker's was a high shrill—almost a bat's screech.

". . . never leave Elva now, Kyning! Do you hear me?"

Over and over that knife-sharp demand pierced into his mind until he understood that it wanted an answer from him. It wouldn't stop until it got an answer. With intense effort, he forced a thin strand of

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breath into a sound. It was no more than a groan, but it seemed to satisfy the screamer.

Not quite so sharp now, but still painful, the voice was crying, "We must move now! We must strike for glory and for victory! *When the blast of war blows in our ears, Then imitate the action of the tiger; Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, Disguise fair nature with hard-favor'd rage; Then lend the eye a terrible aspect* . . . and march on to victory! For the glory of Elva!".

Something stirred itself within the darkness of Kyning's mind—some vague amusement. It was so damned pretentiously pompous—he wanted to laugh in Riker's face. But he was too far away—too lost in the red-black mists of pain. And it wasn't funny, was it? No, not funny at all. But there was nothing he could do about it.

Something touched his face, crawling softly over his skin like scurrying spiders. It was a cool dampness and it sent the fear spinning through him again. They were reviving him to beat him more, he thought. He tried to protest but his voice was only a faint moan in his throat.

"Kyn, Please . . ."

That was Dulcinea calling to him from some far distance. She was frightened, he thought. She needed him. He had to get himself back to wherever she was—to help her.

He struggled his eyes open and found light that was mottled with moving blurs. They were vague and shimmering white figures that he decided must be spirits of the long-dead.

Hands touched him and he thought a thorn pricked his arm. He knew that he was lying on his back and that the pain had lost its sharp edge. It faded into a throbbing like the beating of his heart.

The spirit forms surrounded him. They were Druid priests, stripping him to lay him upon the sacrificial stone. He was being cleansed and purified. He tried to tell them it was no use—all their magic would be to no avail in this task. But they went on with their silent ceremony and he discovered that their arcane ointments were washing away the pain. The last echoes of it faded as the midsummer sun rose over the heelstone.

It was a strange sun, wrapped in heavy mists. Its light was not a thing that he could see, but he felt it billowing over his body. It radiated into his flesh, sucking away the injuries that had been done to him. He closed his eyes, letting the invisible light lull him into relaxed sleep. He lay at rest, content that all eternity should be thus.

But someone was sounding the great bell of Gwyneod and he cursed the sound. Why must they waken him to bear the weight of the golden crown again? Must he rise to take up Excalibur and fight again?

Other men slept in eternal rest. Why must *he* arise again at England's call? If only he could have lain in that lead-crossed coffin under the apple-green grasses of Avalon forever—but the bell was calling him from this Welsh cave and this circle of sleeping warriors. It beckoned him with the voice of Dulcinea and he must answer.

"Rex quondam, Rexque futurus," he mumbled, reaching for Excalibur's jewelled hilt.

There was no weapon under his hand. His fingers caught only thin cloth. He clutched at the pall, wondering if the Norman thieves had stolen his sword. Was everything he valued to be taken from him? With a surge of panic, he

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realized that he was unarmed . . .

And suddenly he was up on his elbows, forcing open his eyes. With shock, he saw the figure in white was no Druid but only a doctor. And the circle was not of sleeping warriors. This was Dulcinea standing beside his bed, the blue scarf she wore vivid against the pallor of her face. At her side was the kindly father-image, Adstrator Gorman.

"To call me *king* is a lie," Kyning muttered. He gave a shake of his head, trying to brush away the fragments of the dream-fantasy that still clung strangely, superimposing themselves over reality. He felt certain he wasn't ready to wake yet. But she had called him and now she stood waiting with her eyes deep and troubled.

She glanced toward the doctor and asked, "Is he all right?"

"I told you he needs more sleep and a final radiation treatment," the man in white snapped. "He'll *be* all right then."

"This is important," Gorman said in a voice that was thin and brittle, completely lacking the warm confidence that should have belonged to a father-image.

Kyning focussed on Dulcinea. The others didn't matter. He said to her, "Are you okay?"

"Kyn!" She reached for his hand, wrapping her fingers tightly over his. They felt icy-cold.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Anxiety flooded her face. "Riker's captured the MCC. He's declared himself Emperor of Elva. What shall we do?"

"What *can* we do?" he mumbled. He was no sleeping Hero to waken and save a nation. Couldn't she understand that? As he sat up pain lashed through the muscles of his abdomen and ribs. It sent a dizzy red nausea past his eyes. He grimaced, fighting against it.

"I told you he's not ready," the doctor grunted. He picked up something from the bedside table. Kyning recognized it as a hypodermic when the doctor reached for his upper arm.

Drawing back, he asked, "Is that stuff going to knock me out again?"

"No, just an analgesic for now," the doctor said. Shrugging toward Dulcinea and Gorman, he added, "They insist on talking to you."

Kyning made no objection to the shot. He looked questioningly toward the girl.

"What shall we do?" she repeated.

"We've got to get off Elva. As quick as we can." He glanced toward Gorman, "You must know a way."

"No," the Adstrator said. It wasn't an answer but a protest. "We have to stop Riker. I've seen what he's capable of. That girl, Janneth . . . you . . . I *can't* let him do something like this to Elva."

"How the hell can you stop him if he's in control of the MCC?"

"You have to help us, Kyn," Dulcinea said.

"Me!"

Gorman nodded. "I can understand the things that Neffa's told me—the aqapa, the conscience circuits—things like that. But I can't understand Riker's mind now. I don't know how to deal with him. But you're the one who taught him this. You understand him. You can talk to him."

"Like hell! I'm still sick from the last talk I had with him. He damned near killed me. I don't want any part of this!"

"Cowardice?" Gorman said.

"My catechism," Kyning snapped back. "Look, I can't . . ."

"Please, Kyn!" Dulcinea said. Her hand clung to his. "You've *got* to help Elva."

"*I* can't solve your planet's problems.

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Dammit, I can't even handle my own. What do you expect from me?"

Gorman stiffened his shoulders, as if he called up some final reserve of strength. "All we're asking is that you talk to the man. Reason with him."

"You think he'll listen to reason?" Kyning grunted.

"He had the good of Elva as his goal in the beginning," Dulcinea said. "*We* want the best for Elva, too. Can't you make him understand that?"

"What the hell—let him run the show!" he answered. "You want change. He'll give it to you."

"But what kind of change? Will it be for the good, Kyn? Or will he treat us all the way he's done Janneth and you? He *had* a good dream, Kyn, but he's lost it somewhere and now we're afraid of him!"

"Neffa's told me everything," Gorman added. "If we can regain the MCC I swear I'll follow through. I'll have those *conscience circuit* things located and deactivated. I'll see to it that Elva's opened up to offworld traffic. We'll break out of our cocoon."

"You'll end up like Riker," Kyning mumbled. "You'll be a whole damned planet of madmen."

Dulcinea shook her head. "We'll do it slowly and carefully. We'll look to the other worlds and learn from them. We'll grow up, Kyn. We want that chance. But with Riker in control . . ."

"You seriously think I can *talk* him into stepping down now that he's declared himself Emperor?"

"You can try!" she answered.

He gazed at her as he told himself he didn't give a damn about Elva. He renounced any responsibility for Riker. All he wanted was to save his own skin—and hers. He gazed into eyes that were deep and desperate in their plea.

"Yes," he muttered. "I can try."

She smiled at him then.

CHAPTER 12

KYNING'S OWN CLOTHES were somewhere being cleaned. They located him a spare suit of doctor's traditional whites and while he dressed, Gorman went to contact the MCC.

He still felt weak and aching, but the analgesic had dulled the sensations, giving them a distant quality, as if they were only shadows of feeling. He hoped it hadn't dulled his mind, too. He'd need his wits to argue with Riker.

Dammit, this was a sleeveless errand. Couldn't they see that? Riker would never listen—probably wouldn't even give him a chance to talk. But maybe after he'd tried—maybe then Dulcinea would understand. Gorman must have enough money to bribe passage on a ship and Riker would have to let freighters in. There'd be some way to escape this insane planet.

He was surprised when Gorman returned with a vague trace of relief lining his face and announced, "He'll see us. When I told him you'd talk for us, he seemed eager."

Maybe there was a chance after all, Kyning thought. Riker might have realized now just what he'd undertaken. The release of tension in having accomplished the coup—an awareness of the responsibility he held now—they might have wakened his senses. He might be willing to listen to advice.

They took Gorman's car. Despite Kyning's protests, Dulcinea insisted on going with them. And he wasn't really

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sorry. It was good to be able to hold on to her hand. There was warm reassurance in her confidence in him.

Once Gorman had turned the car onto the street, Kyning asked for details of what had happened.

"He and his men attacked the MCC building at dawn," the Adstrator told him. "They hit when there was only a skeleton night staff on duty. The first we knew of it was when he cut in the emergency broadcast circuits and announced to the planet that he's in command now. He told us that he is our liberator and our emperor. Made a long speech about breaking the chains of our bondage, and then he said for the time being we should go on with our usual activities. He's called for a mass rally at the concert hall tonight. Said he'd give us our instructions then."

"Did you try to do anything?"

Gorman nodded. "I went to the MCC, but there were men at the doors. They had swords and they wouldn't let me in. Wouldn't even talk to me. They just told me to go home. When I got back I found Neffa waiting for me. She told me about you and about what's been happening."

. . . *and what's been happening,* Kyning thought wearily. What the hell had been happening? How could he have been so blind to Riker's growing madness? In retrospect he could see the warning signs of it clearly. Sure, he could see a lot of things clearly—when it was too late to do anything about them.

The car turned a corner and they were within sight of the building. It sat squat and square like an enchanted white toad in the middle of the park. The grounds around it were empty. A few people, probably MCC employees, stood on the walk across the street, looking like a herd of lost sheep.

Gorman stopped the car and Kyning climbed out. The sun was directly overhead now, washing hotly down onto him. It reflected from the vast expanse of white plastic steps as brilliantly as if they had internal light of their own.

Squinting, he raised his eyes up the steps to the doorway. Two of Riker's lieutenants flanked it in poses of stiff attention. Each rested a hand on the pommel of the sword he wore.

"I've come to see Riker," he called.

One answered, "Approach."

He started up the stairs, aware that Gorman and Dulcinea were following. But the guard snapped, "Just Kyning. The others shall wait below."

He glanced over his shoulder and saw the question on Gorman's face turned toward him. "Wait," he said, nodding.

He walked on alone, and when he had reached the halfway point in the ostentatious span of stairs, the guard called out again.

"That's far enough."

As if it were a cue, the door opened and Riker appeared, with Cleb close behind him. He strode forward and posed at the head of the steps, resplendent in the white costume Janneth had made for his fencing debut. One hand clasped the hilt of the jewelled sword sheathed at his side. The other rose to rest, fisted, on his hip.

He looked down at Kyning and pronounced regally, "We have anticipated this moment."

"I've come to talk to you," Kyning said.

Riker shook his head slowly in denial. "No, you've come to *listen* to us. We are Emperor of Elva now."

"You agreed to talk . . ."

"We agreed to *see* you, and so we do. We are displeased with you, Kyning. But we are a good and generous sovereign. We will consider forgiving you." He made a

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broad, encompassing gesture, "You have been of some small help to us in this, Kyning. We do not forget even these little favors."

Kyning gazed at him as if at a snake coiled to strike. This was far more bizarre than he'd ever imagined.

"We are master of all Elva now," Riker continued. "We have begun our mission of re-educating the people. At this very moment we have technicians locating the sublim circuits in the computer in order to reprogram them . . ."

"*Re*program the sublims! With what?"

He smiled slightly, condescendingly, "Before our people can truly be free, they must be taught to respect and obey us. It is the simplest way to teach them. In their wisdom, the Forefathers understood that. We follow now in their footsteps, providing for the needs of our people, and for their proper education.

"We are a generous and merciful ruler, Kyning. We are willing to allow you to learn our ways, too. Bend your knee to us and ask our forgiveness. If it is asked sincerely, it will be given."

"You're crazy!"

Anger rolled like thunder across Riker's face. With a sharp jerk of his head, he snapped to his lieutenants, "Take the ungrateful churl prisoner."

The two guards drew their swords as they started down the stairs.

Panic surged through Kyning. He fought it down as he took a cautious step back. He'd blown any chance of reasoning with Riker. But, hell, the man was past reasoning. It'd take a damned lot of luck now just to escape.

He glanced back at Dulcinea and Gorman, waiting hopefully by the car. *She'd* suffer too, he thought. This time—just this once—he *had* to succeed—for her sake.

Desperately, he shouted at Riker, "You damned snivelling coward!"

The self-proclaimed emperor waved a hand to halt his men. Scowling, he called, "What was that?"

"You're a coward! You send your men after me. I say you're afraid of me. You're afraid to face me yourself! You haven't got the guts to meet me like a man—in single combat!"

"Haven't I!" Riker screeched, the imperial *we* forgotten. Anger was a darkening red in his face, pulling tight the tendons in his neck. His hand clamped onto the jewelled hilt of the sword at his side.

"Single combat," Kyning taunted. "Give me a weapon and face me like a man!"

Through clenched teeth, Riker ordered, "Cleb, give him your sword!"

Obediently, the lieutenant unbuckled his belt and stepped down to hand the sheathed weapon to Kyning.

As he took it he recognized it as the same Saxon-hilted weapon he'd used as his own in the fencing classes. One kindness of fate, he thought, his hand closing over the familiar hilt. He knew this sword and its balance.

"A moment! A word with my friends," he said, darting his eyes toward Dulcinea and Gorman. He knew the delay would cost him. He could see Riker already beginning to catch hold of his prideful temper. If the man composed himself enough to fight with forethought instead of in a rash frenzy, he'd be a formidable opponent. But Kyning wanted that moment enough to risk it.

His composure returning, Riker glanced at the girl, then said with haughty magnaminity, "We grant you a moment, caitiff knight."

Kyning slung the belt around his waist, buckling it as he walked down the steps. The black pseudo-leather sheath was a

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stark line against the white-legged trousers. Funny—he'd never worn a sword over white before. It looked as sharply grim as some medieval woodcut.

Dulcinea reached toward him. "Kyn, I don't understand! What's happening?"

"An ancient ritual," he said, the calmness of his voice surprising him. Something in his gut was pulsing so violently that he felt every fibre of his body should be trembling.

"It's only a game," he lied, his hands closing on her arms. He held her, bending to brush his lips lightly against hers. There was only a moment now. There'd be time enough later, he told himself.

As he drew back, he looked at the bit of blue cloth she wore at her throat. It caught the color of her eyes.

"Give me your scarf," he said.

"Why?" she asked as she touched it.

"A favor, Lady. Tie it around my arm."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, just do it. Please."

Puzzled, she knotted the scarf around his upper arm.

"I don't understand either," Gorman was saying, intruding on the moment.

"If it works, I'll explain it later," he answered. "If it doesn't work, promise me you'll get her off Elva somehow."

"I promise," Gorman mumbled, his eyes distraught.

Kyning turned back toward Riker and drew the Saxon blade from its sheath. He called, "On the steps like Fairbanks? Or on level ground?"

Riker glanced at the stairs uncertainly. Then he raised his eyes toward the Elvans bunched on the walk across the street.

"Before my people," he answered, starting down the stairs.

Together the two men walked into the empty street. There, they faced each other. And with a frightening calm, Riker drew out his sword. Sunlight caught in a golden glint on its tip as he poised, ready.

In a voice that was softly restrained, but heavy with hunger for blood, he said, "I've beaten you at this game before, Kyning, you vile filth. Now I'll mince your lights. I'll spill your stinking brains out through your eyesockets. I'll skewer your liver . . ."

Kyning recognized his own words being thrown back at him. He knew then the depth of the insult—the humiliation—he'd given Riker's pride the night before. He understood the drive that revenge could be.

And he knew that his own arm was stiff with tension. His hand was too tight on the hilt of the sword, knuckles drained a bloodless white seeming ready to burst through the taut skin. He couldn't fight like this, he thought. He had to hate and to do it as intensely as Riker did. He had to overwhelm and bury his fear in hatred or he'd fail.

Gazing at the gaudy white figure before him, he superimposed the image of Deptfort over it. Riker and Deptfort and every damned accursed enemy he'd ever hated in all his life—himself included—all in one. He envisioned them all in a single figure—a maggoty corruption hidden behind the pristine white of the purehearted hero. Make this one man a symbol—defeat the symbol and destroy the evil. Destroy the lies and the hypocrisy that had destroyed his own life. Destroy or die . . .

With a shout, Riker lunged.

Kyning caught the blade with his own, fending the stroke, trying to move against it—in and under it. But Riker parried. And thrust.

Steel caught steel—no false sounding plates this time—the honest steel of sharpened blades clashing, echoing in the silence that surrounded them.

A feint—recognized and foiled. A

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thrust. A blade skimming close, catching the cloth of Kyning's shirt—he leaped back, then lunged. The tip of his own sword bit at Riker's tunic, slashing into the fabric.

"First blood!" he shouted as he saw the thin course of red follow his blade.

Startled, Riker yelped and yielded a step.

First blood—but this was no duel of etiquette to be ended with a faint cut. Kyning drove, pushing his opponent back, trying to maneuver him to the curbstone, hoping to founder him against its rise.

But then Riker was swinging with suddenly renewed fury. And it was Kyning who gave ground.

The fencing lessons had been too well taught, and the thinking lessons a failure, he thought as the blade sought for his flesh. It lusted for his blood. Blood for blood. Was that what he'd taught Riker? Was there so much corruption in him that he could teach only evil?

A low growl rose in Riker's throat, as if he'd brought his quarry to bay. He drove against Kyning's sword, pressing the battle, and Kyning was yielding now, despairing of his own skill.

Steel! Kyning felt metal grate against bone as a thrust found his ribs. He felt the lightning tine of pain—but it was strangely unreal, muffled by the analgesic still in his system. Almost the instant it struck, he was moving.

Quickly—intentionally—he was turning his body against the blade that impaled him. He could feel it wedging, levered between the bones of his chest. It twisted in his flesh, intensifying the pain, but the analgesic remained a shield between the sword and his consciousness.

Riker clung to the hilt, wrapping his other hand over it now, trying to free the weapon. But Kyning held it with the angle of his body.

For that instant Riker was disarmed. And Kyning swung.

Desperately twisted against the pinion of steel, holding it vised between his ribs, Kyning lashed out with his own sword. He aimed under Riker's outstretched arm and hewed as if with an axe.

His wrist felt the jolt as the broad blade struck. He heard Riker's beginning screech of pain cut short as the blade cleaved into soft flesh between the bottom rib and the bone of the hip.

Kyning had heaved the sword with all the strength that was in him, backing the swing with the untwisting of his body. The weapon was heavy, the blade finer and sharper than ever any Saxon steel had been. It cut deep. Like a razor-edged battle axe, it sliced. It slid through flesh until it struck the hard obstacle of spinal bone.

For an instant Riker's body hung on the sword, the face suddenly blank and as pale as the tunic. The weight of it was pulling Kyning's hand down. The body slid from the blade. Its fingers were still locked on the hilt of the jewelled sword. As it toppled, the clasped hands drew the sword from Kyning's chest.

Kyning watched the half-severed body crumple into a heap of white cloth at his feet. It was quickly staining with a brilliant red. The jewel-hilted sword it clutched was also deep-stained.

He could feel the muffled pain in his chest as a knot that cramped his lungs. Gasping awkwardly for breath, he stared in astonishment at the figure on the ground before him.

Was this another insane dream? Or had he actually done it?

Grinning with a weird cynical amusement, he told himself that it was all real. He had actually slain the tyrant and freed the captive castle. He had

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saved the damozel.

Riker had been a worthy opponent, he thought.

"Sire!" someone said.

"Bury him with a dog at his feet," he mumbled, gazing at Riker's body. Slowly, in a vague way he realized that someone had come up to his side. He turned his head to look. His neck seemed stiff and his vision dull. He had to squint to recognize the speaker as Cleb.

"We surrender to you, Sire," the lieutenant said, bowing.

It was hard to shape words. His mouth was sticky with a thick salt taste. "Not me, *him,*" he said, glancing toward the Adstrator. "Gorman—he's your elected leader. Give your allegiance to him."

Cleb bowed again and turned away obediently.

Bracing against his sword as if it were a staff Kyning sunk to his knees. One hand clung to the weapon for support: The other sought the mouth of the wound in his chest. It spewed hot blood over his fingers.

"Kyn!"

This anxious voice was Dulcinea's, and he knew that the sudden weight on his shoulder was her hand.

He tried to look up at her, and to speak her name, but the effort exploded shards of pain within him that pierced through the protection of the analgesic. For a moment he sank deep into darkness and was lost in it.

He heard her calling to him. He thought desperately that he had to reach her—to see her once more. There was so much he wanted to say to her. But she was so far away.

Fighting to bridge the gap between them, he forced open his eyes. He found her there, bending over him, hazed in red as if the sun were setting before her face.

He was aware that he lay on the ground now, his head cradled in her arms. He could feel the softness of her breast against his cheek. And beyond her, he could see the dim form of Gorman's face peering at him.

"It's over," Gorman said thinly.

Not over, Kyning thought. *It's just beginning—Elva's newborn and now it's got to face all the pain and misery of growing up.*

He wanted to tell them that, but his mouth refused to shape the words. And, hell, there wasn't any need to say it. They'd find it out for themselves.

He felt strangely suspended in Dulcinea's arms, caught and held somewhere between dreams and reality. The pain in his chest was vague, almost impersonal now, like some half-remembered fantasy. But the sword still grasped in his hand was a steel-hard reality.

All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

Ought to say something appropriate, he told himself. Should make some grand statement worthy of being sung by the poets in centuries to come. Couldn't think of anything though. Hell of a note. A lifetime of words—all words—and now not one damned one that was suitable.

He tried then to speak her name, but he couldn't do that either. It was a cheat, he thought. Tenors could perform whole arias with daggers through their guts—and *he* couldn't manage one single word. But the tenors were in fantasies, weren't they? And this was real . . .

There was no Balsam of Fierabras for this wound. It was too damned deep. All the sorcery of their science couldn't repair it. That didn't matter though, did it?

The important thing was that he'd succeeded—*for a trouthe . . . for a woman's sake*—he'd won at last.

—Lee Hoffman

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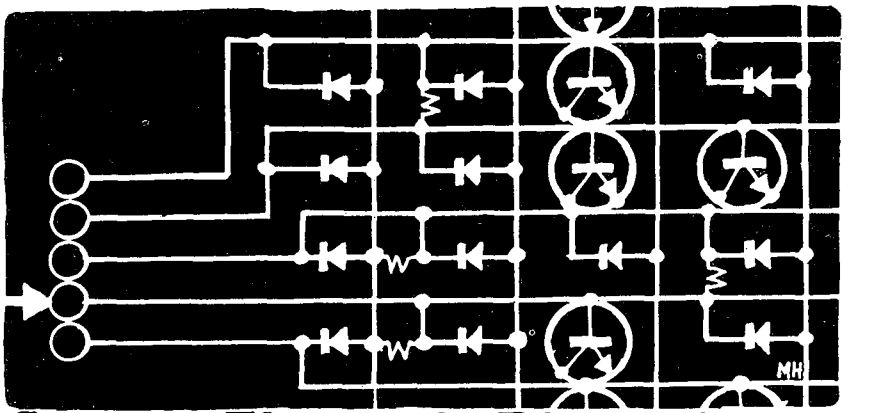

Science Fiction in Dimension

a critical column by ALEXEI PANSHIN

THE NATURE OF SCIENCE FICTION

There has always been a discrepancy between what has been published as science fiction and what science fiction has been thought to be. Science fiction has been held to be in some sense fiction about science. For instance, Theodore Sturgeon defines science fiction as "a story built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content." Science fiction has been held to be Realistic fiction, as opposed to Fantasy. Robert Heinlein says, "realistic future-scene fiction . . . contains nothing which is not science fiction and contains at least 90% of all science fiction in print." That other 10% is either realistic historical fiction or realistic contemporary fiction.

The discrepancies between these definitions and published science fiction have generally been taken as signs of inadequacy in the fiction—a fall from grace—rather than as inadequacy in the definitions. But if the definitions are inadequate and science fiction is a larger thing than they admit, our expectations of the field must be revised.

Science fiction, as originally conceived by Hugo Gernsback, was an artificial publishing category, as limited as pornography: fiction about the science of the future. Gernsback named the field and he provided a model for it in his novel, *Ralph 124C 41+: A Romance of the Year 2660.*

In practice, science fiction may or may not even mention science. The definitions always do. For instance, Robert Heinlein approvingly summarizes a Reginald Bretnor testimonial of faith: science fiction is "that sort in which the author shows awareness of the nature and importance of the human activity known as the scientific method, shows equal awareness of the great body of human knowledge already collected through that activity, and takes into account in his stories the effects and possible future effects on human beings of scientific method and scientific fact."

Science fiction about science? In what

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meaningful way?

In the first place, science fiction is not in itself science. It is not a scientifically made fiction, guaranteed more durable. It is a form of art done in an artistic manner for artistic ends.

Art and science are different and exclusive activities. To confuse them is a mistake.

We are born as children or tourists in a strange and busy universe that we lack the information or the insight to fully understand. We have no trustworthy native guides. We are left to make our own sense of the chaos.

Children make sense out of a bewildering world by playing *as if*—and so do we through the separate games of science and art. Out of whatever information and insight is available to us, we construct and test our trial models of the universe. We assume order and then impose our inventions on the universe in a process of endless approximation. When our trials come to seem inadequate, we discard them and try again. The ones that still have use we pass on to our successors for their own delight, just as children, tourists through childhood, pass on their games to their juniors.

Art is more a game of pattern-making than pattern-testing. It is a metaphorical, discontinuous and analogical process that suspends as much as it cares to of what we take to be fact in order to see the world in a new way. Fact is only the exterior bond of art and relevance. In doing art, information is subordinate to intuition.

Science is more a game of pattern-testing than pattern-making. It is a literal, continuous and logical process of measurement and description of local conditions. Intuition sets science's goals, but doing things scientifically means subordinating intuition to information.

It is possible for a person to be both artist and scientist, thinking first in one mode and then in the other. The two are complementary, but separate processes. Science fiction, as a literary form, cannot be scientific.

If science fiction is reportage of science, it is datable. If science fiction is accurate prediction of science, it is an ingenious triviality. If science fiction is inaccurate prediction of science, it is silly. In trying to live by Gernsback, science fiction has been as ingenious and silly as *Ralph 124C 41+*—written in 1911, it told a world of 2660 in which people explain television, juke boxes, liquid fertilizer, night baseball and vending machines to each other.

The science in science fiction is at best a metaphor of science's hopes for itself, an expression of love for those who think quantitatively. There is no reason why metaphors of science should not continue to be published, but there is no reason that they should be the necessary sum of science fiction.

If pornography—metaphors of sex—were taken to be the sum of literature, we might have an equivalent situation. Then as writers discovered a wider universe to write about, in time they might only nod to the bedroom, as science fiction writers nod to science, while definition lagged behind.

Science in science fiction is a historical accident. Science in science fiction is a possible metaphor. More often, it is an irrelevance.

The question of reality in science fiction is equally a shibboleth of definition. Its origin is less certain, but I take it to be a position of retreat from the argument to science: "Science fiction may not be scientific, but at least it's

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realistic. It isn't fantasy."

In fact, science fiction and fantasy are continuous and impossible to completely distinguish. Attempts to distinguish them, like this one of Kingsley Amis', fall apart in blur: "Science fiction . . . maintains a respect for fact or presumptive fact, fantasy makes a point of flouting these; for a furniture of robots, space-ships, techniques and equations it substitutes elves, broomsticks, occult powers, and incantations . . . It might be thought that, to push it to the limit, a fantasy story could be turned into a science-fiction story merely by inserting a few lines of pseudo-scientific patter, and I would accept this as an extreme theoretical case, although I cannot think of an actual one. Even so, a difference which makes the difference between abandoning verisimilitude and trying to preserve it seems to me to make all the difference, and in practice the arbitrary and whimsical development of nearly every story of fantasy soon puts it beyond recovery by any talk of galactic federations or molecular vibrations. One parenthetical note: it should not be thought that no story dealing with elves and such can be science fiction." And so on.

Ultimately and necessarily "reality" becomes a nebulous test of faith. L. Sprague de Camp says that John Campbell distinguishes science fiction and fantasy "by saying that a story is science fiction if the writer believes it could happen, fantasy if he thinks it could not." Robert Heinlein opts for an even more exacting test: "Unfortunately there is never full agreement as to the 'established facts' nor as to what constitutes the 'real world,' and definitions by intention are seldom satisfactory. By these two terms I mean the factual universe of our experience in the sense in which one would expect such words to be used by educated and enlightened members of the western culture in 1959."

If fact, or believed fact, is the stuff of realism, as it is the stuff of science, then all art is to some extent fantasy. Fiction of any sort tampers in some measure with the limitations of time, space, human knowledge and human expression. People in fiction—Shakespeare's or Hemingway's—don't talk as people do in life. Cause and effect are known in fiction as they never can be in life. The world of fiction is always a New Reality. Art always suspends some portion of "fact"—the only question is the degree of the fantasy.

Fiction that chooses to suspend as little fact as possible may be called Realistic, at least after a fashion. However, there are costs.

Fiction that noses after fact is vulnerable. Nothing ruins a good story better than someone who can say, "I was there and I know better." Shakespeare was attacked on this ground in his own time by Ben Jonson who objected to Shakespeare's use of a Bohemian seacoast in *The Winter's Tale*. He knew better and the tale was compromised for him. However, the trouble is not the seacoast—the trouble is Bohemia. It is the sort of unnecessary trouble courted by any fiction that invokes fact. The facts of Africa do not substantiate Edgar Rice Burroughs, or even Robert Ruark.

More important, however, fiction that deliberately aims to cut itself to the size of reportage abdicates the point of art, which is new vision. Our present realistic mainstream, the social novel, is an increasingly frustrated form, as a reading

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of any week's *New York Times Book Review* will show. As long as fiction limits itself to the facts, it cannot offer an alternative to them. It can only become shriller and more frustrated.

Far from being realistic, science fiction, which deals with might-bes far removed from any fact, has to be one of the least realistic of fictions. To the extent that science fiction attempts to be realistic according to present notions, it must be both limited and dated.

The real problem that science fiction presents to its definers is its removal from present actuality. That removal from the here-and-now opens tremendous possibilities, most of them not only unrealized, but undreamed. If art seeks modes in which to concretize new abstractions, the possible universes offered by what we call "science fiction" have to be potential major art. It would not matter in what way you attempted to artificially limit the new fiction through definition. It would necessarily expand beyond its definitions, as science fiction has.

The removed world—the World Beyond the Hill—is not new. It is the exotic land that lies beyond experience, that fantasy world which is the home not merely of the supernatural, but of greater men than ourselves and tighter webs than any we know, of strange countries and unknown beasts and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. It is a world, unlike the world of realistic fiction, where tragedy is possible. Only in the World Beyond the Hill is the concentration of event and meaning of the tragic vision possible. And the World Beyond the Hill is the setting of other exalted fictions: Arthurian legend, *The Tempest,* and *Paradise Lost.*

In earlier times, the removed world was actually stated to be just over the hill. Fact and people who have been places and know better have pushed the removed world out of America, out of Africa, out of the last Pacific islands, off the Earth entirely. It is no accident that science fiction should have appeared as a genre in the 20th Century at exactly the period when the very last Earthly Shangri-Las could still pretend to exist. You might say that the rockets of science fiction were the vehicle of escape for the removed world. In the universe of imagination, it is now beyond any reach of expanding fact.

In actuality, the World Beyond the Hill has two contemporary modes: fantasy and science fiction. We might take them for two blotches on a scatter diagram of the empty universes of the possible.

Contemporary fantasy is a recreative form. Being openly and explicitly of the World Beyond the Hill, it is safe from the irrelevance of factual criticism. However, as a conscious remaking of older myths that are no longer believed in, but are merely expected to entertain, it is sterile and limited. The power and existence of wizards, dragons and John Wayne lie in a world of the past for a past people. For us, they can only be fleetingly relevant echoes of what they once were. Fantasy is no more than a blotch in one small corner of the diagram.

Present science fiction is timid and clumsy. It is still sufficiently intimidated by the things that it has thought it ought to be—"real" and "scientific" (not to mention short and melodramatic)—that it yet has no idea of what it might be. What it has is a feeling of imminence. Science fiction is a thin blotch extending a short distance out of fantasy's corner.

The rest of the scatter diagram is empty. That's enough to give anyone a feeling of imminence.

—Alexei Panshin

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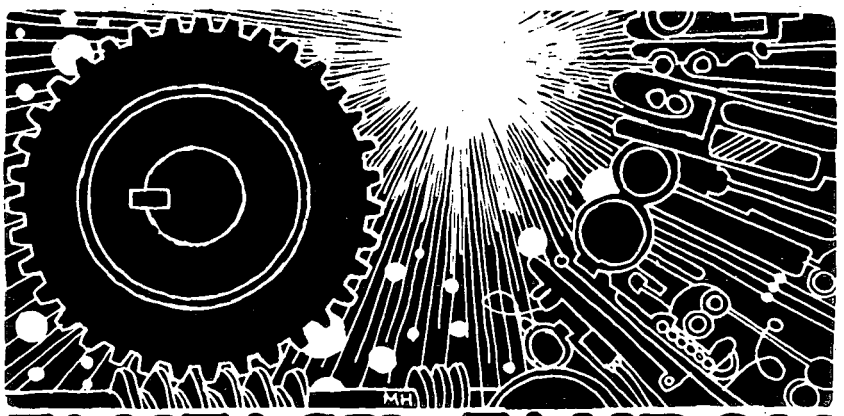

The letter/essay by Jeffrey Clarke under this heading in our April issue provoked a good deal of comment, not the least of which was the following essay by John J. Pierce. Frankly, the response—including Pierce's—surprises and pleases me. John Pierce's essay strikes me as one of the most thoughtful and sensible statements he has made on the subject of "Old Wave" vs. "New Wave," and for once the polemical rhetoric is absent. In a coincidental fashion Pierce's discussion of science fiction also dovetails with that by Alexei Panshin, in this issue's Science Fiction in Dimension. *My own feeling, in reading both pieces side-by-side, is that the field we call "science fiction" is an amorphous one which seems easily to adjust itself to surprisingly diverse definitions and tastes. But then, perhaps that was already obvious—TW*

If one is going to propose a course for science fiction, it seems that, as a starting point, one must have a clear idea of the nature and function of the genre.

All sorts of things have been labeled as "science fiction" at one time or another, from Japanese monster movies to allegorical fantasies like "The Prisoner." Small wonder, then, that the general public is confused about the genre. This confusion, however, has affected fans and writers as well.

If science fiction has any overall theme, it is that of man in relation to change. The genre arose in the Nineteenth Century largely as a result of two realizations: that the world had entered a period of rapid and continuous change for the first time, and that this change was related to the discoveries and inventions of science.

The *full* impact of science upon our world was slow to be realized, however. At the same time the scientific method was revealing new truths about the world and the universe, it was discrediting the old "truths" of religion—was relentlessly

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undermining all traditional systems of value.

Breakthroughs in paleontology and cosmology revealed a picture of life and a universe in constant evolution—they gave dramatic emphasis to the old proverb that "the only permanent thing is change." But at the same time, the Death of God seemed to reveal change as a process devoid of any "meaning."

Yet what was "meaning" in the first place but the fulfillment of men's emotional needs? It never really existed outside consciousness. Traditional religions never had anything to do with the real universe—they were an expression of the need to give "meaning" to our own lives, to establish standards of value, of good and evil.

Meaning is still possible, then. But it must be in relation to the real universe, rather than to artificial constructs as such. And since the only constant thing is change, men now feel the need to create meaning out of change. It was this need that—albeit probably unconsciously—gave rise to the idea of "progress."

Progress was never intended simply as a synonym for change, but as one for meaningful change. In part, it was inspired by analogy with the experience of the individual. One is born completely helpless and ignorant in the world, but strives to learn and to understand and to eventually realize his highest possibilities—whatever they may be.

The human race, too, appeared upon the Earth almost completely helpless and ignorant. Since then, history has been a continual struggle—marked by fits and starts, and many setbacks—toward knowledge and understanding of the world and the universe, toward the realization of our highest possibilities as a species.

This was not evident until recently, simply because the changes were too slow to be noticeable in an individual lifetime. Not too many centuries ago, a man could live a full three score years and ten and witness no new things that affected his existence in any vital manner. Mankind seemed to be afflicted by an unchanging fate—though this was really only inertia.

When in times past men spoke of fate, what they really had in mind was chance. Men's lives were constantly being imposed upon by pointless natural disasters—plagues, famines, floods, fires, and the like—as well as by pointless wars, the whims of priests and tyrants; etc. As far as they affected the individual, these were occurrences of chance—and therefore meaningless.

The idea of progress was the idea, then, of making man independent of chance. There was often talk of "conquering nature"—a phrase now often denounced because of its association with the brutalization of the environment by pollution and overpopulation. But what those who spoke of "conquering nature" really meant was "conquering chance"—of removing the obstacles that seemed to make "meaning" impossible.

Freedom from chance is the goal toward which the human race has been groping now for millenia. But our only means of pursuing this goal is our own intelligence. We are brought into the world naked and helpless, with hardly any specialized skills or instincts. We survive and prosper only by our wits—and the manner in which we apply our wits is the scientific method.

Because the past has already happened, is fixed, only the future really concerns us. The lessons of the past have meaning only as they can be applied to the future. Science fiction deals with man

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in relation to change, then—but in relation to future change. And the problem of "meaning" brings in the question of values in relation to future change.

We know that, in evolution, the only test of a species is its ability to survive. Science fiction must be concerned, to begin with, with how the human race can survive in the future—and all its value judgments must be colored by this concern.

Lester del Rey's novel, *The Eleventh Commandment,* illustrates this basic principle. The action takes place on a future Earth ruled by a cruel and tyrannical church that encourages overpopulation and the misery resulting therefrom—that violates every standard of decency we hold dear. Yet its position is justified in the end—only because its policy turns out to be necessary to the survival of the human race the germ plasm of which has been contaminated by atomic war.

Many writers—even the supposedly anti-scientific Ray Bradbury—have argued that space travel can be justified by the need to assure racial immortality. Mankind must become independent of the chance disasters that may befall an individual planet—whether a natural catastrophe (our Sun becoming a Nova, a change in the isostatic balance melting the Earth's crust) or one caused by the worst among us (a war, or unchecked pollution).

Such judgments relate to extreme cases, of course—though some of them are obviously by no means far-fetched. But beyond that, science fiction must affirm the value of the scientific method—not because it is "traditional" or represents the "Establishment," but because it is our basic means of survival and well being in the real universe. This is why science fiction must be a "rationalist" literature, and why some writers have taken a wrong turn by their insistence on irrational approaches, mysticism and "non-linear" thought. Even when science fiction deals with religion, it should do so from a secular point of view.

Laying aside the question of survival as such, there remains the question of progress—of mankind reaching out towards his highest possibilities. But what *are* our highest possibilities? What sort of a future do we want? Which patterns of thought advance progress and which retard it? What would be the impact of factors which may exist in the universe, or come to pass, but which are not a part of our present experience?

These are questions that science fiction, and science fiction alone, can deal with. Because they relate to the future, to our long range destiny as a species, they can be called "eschatological" questions. Eschatology was originally a theological term applied to doctrines about salvation, immortality, the last judgment and other "last things," but has since acquired a secular meaning.

In science fiction, the term "eschatological fiction" has been applied by C.S. Lewis to works explicitly outlining one or another kind of human destiny—like Arthur C. Clarke's "Childhood's End." But in a broader sense, the best science fiction has eschatological overtones—or is written in an eschatological context that treats questions of values and meaning in terms of an overall theory about the proper direction of mankind.

Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* is a perfect example. The plot is based on a problem of understanding between two men—who are separated by

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their differing sexual natures and all that these mean in terms of psychology and culture. But in the goals of the Ekumen—"augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life"—Mrs. LeGuin sees diversity itself as enriching all men, as creating new opportunities for exchange of ideas and creation of a sort of racial *gestalt*. It is in terms of this eschatology that Genly Ai and Lord Estraven are able to find common cause.

Most science fiction stories deal with the practical and moral problems created by new discoveries, inventions, or conditions—yet they tend to reflect some sort of eschatological viewpoint, whether the story-problem has to do with creating a self-sufficient environment on Mars (Isaac Asimov in "The Martian Way"), the responsibilities associated with creating life (Cordwainer Smith in tales involving the Underpeople), the possibility of having to take our place among other intelligent species (Clifford D. Simak's "Way Station"), or even the conflict of social forces (Robert A. Heinlein's "...If This Goes On").

It is in relation to this understanding of the nature and function of science fiction that the Second Foundation sees the issue raised in recent years between the (alleged) "Old Wave" and the (alleged) "New Wave."

The Second Foundation holds that science fiction's aesthetic approach should be one of Eschatological Romanticism—one of examining questions of values and meaning in an eschatological context that clearly takes into account our understanding of ourselves and the universe as revealed by science, and that further takes into account the kinds of change we can extrapolate or speculate about on the basis of our present knowledge. In short, the problems of real change in the real universe and what they might or ought to mean to us.

The term "New Wave" was first used in England, by Michael Moorcrck and others, to describe the school of writing being introduced in *New Worlds* by J.G. Ballard and his followers. The term was picked up and popularized in this country by Judith Merril—who later changed it to "New Thing," and applied it to American writers like Thomas Disch who seemed to share Ballard's fundamental oremises. She also related the "New Thing" to writers like Kurt Vonnegut and William S. Burroughs, and saw antecedents in Jorge Luis Borges and others.

Now what, precisely, *were* the fundamental premises of Ballard and those who emulated him? First, a total rejection of the scientific approach to the universe—which he presented as something completely incomprehensible and vaguely menacing. Second, a total disinterest in the fate of mankind—human life is seen as a "disaster area," as inevitably ruled by chance and therefore meaningless. Nor does any Ballard protagonist make the slightest effort to come to grips with the problems of existence—complete surrender and quasi-suicide are offered as the only course.

This assault on rationality, this retreat from understanding, was the essential basis of the "disaster school" as promulgated by Ballard. Only by understanding our problems can we hope to solve them, and the scientific method is our only real approach to understanding. So the Ballard school had to rule out science by its very nature.

The Ballard approach is totally opposed to that of science fiction—even

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to that of the science fiction disaster story. James Blish's "We All Die Naked," for example, is a disaster story. But it takes a rational approach. Blish makes the nature of the imagined disaster clear—and he makes it equally clear what led to it, and what ought to have been done to prevent it.

By contrast, the Ballard approach is completely fatalistic. His message is that doom is inevitable; that mankind simply does not have the ability to understand the universe or the capacity to control his own destiny. Of course, he would say that this is simply the truth. But this is not really borne out by either history or science—and it certainly should not be the outlook of science fiction.

To revise a Pascalian argument, if doom is really inevitable, if the future is really meaningless, we can certainly be no worse off for attempting to swerve the course of fate. But if we do indeed have the capacity to change ourselves and our environment—and are dissuaded from the effort by Ballard and those like him, what judgment on the doom-sayers?

Science fiction should be optimistic—about the *possibilities* of man. This does *not* mean, as some have claimed, preaching that man is "perfect," or that we presently live in the best of all possible worlds, or that "whatever is, is right." On the contrary, science fiction has *never* preached this—as the most cursory examination of the history of the genre will indicate.

If there is any "concensus" among science fiction writers at all, it is that the development of mankind is a perpetual struggle between advance and retreat—that each generation must defend again the gains made by the labors of millions of men before them, that our highest dreams can be realized only through supreme effort and sacrifice—that, in Heinlein's words, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch."

The "New Wave" as represented by the Ballard school represents an abdication of *responsibility—man's responsibility to* understand and cope with the universe and the problems of the universe. The same can be said of Harlan Ellison's branch of the "New Wave"—the school that projects social protest nightmares rather than Ballard's surrealistic nightmares. The style and specific subjects may differ—but the outlook is the same.

There are other false trails that are not intrinsically a part of the "New Wave," but which aren't exactly science fiction, either. For instance, there are the fantasies that seem to relate largely to private experience—like Samuel Delany's *The Einstein Intersection.* There's nothing wrong with them, really—they can be works of genius. They simply aren't science fiction—in function, at least.

A number of borderline writers—Piers Anthony for example—tend to specialize in allegories about the "Human Condition" vaguely disguised as science fiction. These abound in symbols and archetypes—and if one is Jung in heart, they may be profoundly interesting. But again, this type of writing really doesn't serve the same function science fiction does.

Another common false trail is the "sociological" story that is neither extrapolation nor speculation, but simply contemporary social criticism in disguise. H.H. Hollis presented his views on the Vietnam war in "The Guerrila Trees," and Poul Anderson propagandized for the Right in "Operation Changeling." Poorly extrapolated backgrounds like that of Norman Spinrad's "Bug Jack Barron"

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

least one willing female found herself surrounded by boys eager to "grok her in fullness," as the saying goes. Due to the instability of the people involved—all of them adolescents then—these nests quickly broke up. Then a second wave swept the country as college students outside the sf world itself discovered the book. It succeeded Tolkien on many campuses. Again, Heinlein's beguiling sophistries—all made possible by the implicit magic of "Martian" disciplines—captured converts. But, lacking a "Martian" guru, and having none too firm a control over the reins of their explosive young emotions, most of these converts found their enthusiasms lasted only a short season—summer vacation, say—while they learned that freely sharing sex and love with others was something more easily aspired to than accomplished.

And ultimately the "flower children" discovered Heinlein. Here his teachings fell upon their most fertile ground. Most of these original hippies were already groping in the same idealistic directions. And, unlike those who had come before them, they had one basic advantage: psychedelic drugs. Neither aphrodisiacs (*vide* Dr. Leary) nor anti-aphrodisiacs, the psychedelic drugs, when used as a part of one's daily experience, allow both detachment from some of the more violent emotions (like jealousy) and a distraction from them.

Already living communally, idealistically attempting to break down what they considered to be destructive social conditioning (such as the urge for privacy, the desire for a one-to-one exclusive relationship with a member of the opposite sex, etc.), these people had been searching for guides and for meaningful philosophies.

To their credit, some of them found better, more responsible teachers than an ex-engineer who was apparently projecting his own wish-fulfillment fantasies upon a badly-written novel. But once again "grok" was a by-word, and one cannot be too surprised that Manson, an ecclectic who apparently stole freely from his intellectual superiors, eventually found in *Stranger* a perverted justification for his own predatory instincts.

Crimes of this sort beget similar crimes. Unstable people, primed for violence, can be touched off by the example set before them by the news media. Although a direct cause-and-effect relationship is difficult to prove (and matters little, since such people are time bombs awaiting detonation anyway; if not *this* stimulus, then another), either between *Stranger in a Strange Land* and the Tate murders (and allied murders by the same group), or between those murders and more recent "ritualistic murders" by other groups, there is a chain of psychotic behavior running through them all.

Last night the news was concerned with the murder of the family of an Army doctor, and his own near-death. The murderers were described as young, white, and hippie-like. One of them scrawled "Death to Pigs" in blood at the scene. At least one girl was involved. Already commentators are noting the similarities to the Tate murders and calling them both "ritualistic murders".

"The rats are getting restless," my wife said to me, while we watched the news on tv.

Studies of a variety of animals—not rats alone, as popularly supposed—show that when they are well-fed and allowed

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to breed without restriction in a confined environment, population pressures eventually destroy their social systems and lead to mass insanity. The three most common outlets for this insanity are passivity—simply becoming completely apathetic and withdrawing totally; random aggressiveness—irrational violence committed against anyone close at hand; or a kind of gluttonous irrational eating habit which may lead to cannibalism, and will eventually lead to death. In all cases the animal loses its rationality, and abandons its instinctual patterns of behavior.

Man *is* an animal. We have more conscious intellect than any other animal (we think; some scientists aren't entirely sure about porpoises), but we spent, as a race, far more time existing on an animal level than we have as "civilized" creatures apart from nature.

Every new study on the subject shows that we obey most of the common laws which govern the animal kingdom as a whole.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in parallel studies of animals and humans in states of overpopulation.

For a conscious individual "overpopulation" is more a state of mind than a physical circumstance. Its pressures can be felt as easily in the affluent suburbs as in the inner-city ghettos where families are packed a dozen individuals to a room. In studies of violent criminals it has been discovered that each of us unconsciously draws an imaginary circle around ourselves, and tries to maintain that distance from other people. (Oddly enough, I first encountered this insight in a Scientology lecture in 1957. Well, that only emphasizes my point that for all its claptrap, Scientology does have some worthwhile things to say.) When a person crosses the boundary we've drawn, we are inclined towards hostility, especially if we cannot restore the proper distance. In the cases of violent criminals, it was found that this social barrier was at a greater distance from them than is common with most people; when it was crossed—as inevitably it was—these people felt threatened, and occasionally so fearfully so that they resorted to violence to restore the proper distance.

(A parlor game: At a party or gathering of strangers and acquaintances, try approaching people more closely than usual. Walk up so close that only inches separate you. Watch your victim back off. Keep advancing. Watch him get nervous. Back him into a corner, and see what he finally does. Keen fun for sadists.)

This circle that one draws about one will vary with the place, the occasion, and the people. (Loved ones are allowed inside; they become a part of the self, and the circle is redrawn to include you both.) It is, as I said, a state of mind.

When one feels one's barriers are constantly being impinged-upon, one is living in a state of overpopulation.

Living in New York City, I can witness the results of this on a daily basis. Here, in a city where eight million people live, and an equal number commute in to work from surrounding areas, social orders are breaking down or reestablishing themselves in new, neurotic forms. The shell of privacy which the subway rider, crammed like a sardine against his fellows during rush hour, is forced to erect around himself is but one example. Another is the almost violent desire not to become involved. (We all remember the Queens stabbing of a woman before over thirty witnesses, don't we?)

Yesterday I ran into a manifestation of

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this social paranoia at its most common level: rudeness and irrationality.

I was driving my car down a sidestreet, looking for a parking place. I found one, and drew abreast of the car in front of it, preparitory to backing into it. A taxi stopped directly behind me, blocking me. I had pulled over to the side and knew there was room to go around. When the taxi didn't budge, I got out and asked the driver to go around me. I was polite at first.

He refused. He said, when I said I wanted to back into the parking space, "I cain't read your mind, buddy!" He insisted that he could not get around my car, although the space was obviously there, and taxidrivers are notorious for risking the paint on their fenders in close spaces. And while we argued, the traffic piled up behind him.

Eventually I drove around the block and got the space. But by the time I did, I was shaking with anger—an anger which had no outlet, since I'd badly wanted to reach through the cabby's open window and hit him, but had refrained due to my social conditioning against such direct outlets of hostility.

God knows why the cabby behaved so irrationally. Perhaps somebody had done something nasty to him a short time before. But the effect of his actions was to additionally fray his temper, anger me, and undoubtedly annoy the people in the cars stopped behind him. And this sort of social friction is common, an everyday occurrance, in most cities in this country.

We all feel it: people are closing in around us, hemming us in, trapping us. Modern apartment buildings have paper-thin walls and you live out your whole life before your neighbors, whom you deeply resent for this incursion on your privacy. Modern suburbs are hardly any better; when the neighbor down the block starts mowing his lawn with a power-mower at 9:00 am on a quiet Sunday morning and it's your only day to sleep late, you feel like murdering him. And so it goes. The frontiers—at least those easily accessable to us—are gone. We feel a hopelessness, a restless paranoia that manifests itself in our shortness of temper, our rudeness to strangers, our willingness to pick fights. We're on the raw edge.

Overpopulation.

Sure, nothing like the overpopulation in India, or China, or parts of Africa or South America, or even our teeming ghettos (which most of us have managed to avoid experiencing). But the people in those crowded circumstances *aren't* well-fed, they haven't the leisure for easy annoyance. Trapped, often, in subsistance-level existences, they lack the luxury of our ellusive paranoia. They have to worry about staying alive. Their fight is more grim and more real.

But they feel it too. In India the religions of centuries have encouraged passivity. Apathy was the answer. This held true in the black ghettos in this country until a short time ago, but holds true no longer. Witness black militancy.

But the shocking thing—the symptom which reveals how truly pervasive this overpopulation madness has become in our country—is the way in which the white middle-class—Nixon's Silent Majority—is revolting. Full of self-righteousness and fear, the older generation has become reactionary and repressive. Full of self-righteousness and anger, the younger generation is fomenting a revolution against their parents.

The rats are turning irrationally upon each other and attacking their own

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parents, mates and offspring.

"Ritualistic murder" is just a name for something most people do not yet understand. It's a label, pinned upon an extreme manifestation of overpopulation paranoia. It means murder-for-the-sake-of-murder. It would be the same if I, after my run-in with that taxi driver, went home and found a kitchen knife and stabbed the first person I saw thereafter. It is an acting-out of repressed violence—the violence that is growing in all of us as we feel our barriers daily encroached-upon.

One cannot view this developing madness in our population without feeling fear. Fear that it is already too late. Fear that we have this time set the wheels in motion for our own mass suicide as a race. Fear that "ritualistic murder" and other manifestations of our growing paranoia will slowly but surely increase—and in themselves plant the seeds of greater paranoia.

Where do the answers lie? That's the sort of question we science fiction writers often pose, usually fatuously. They don't lie in "Martian" salvation, to be certain. Nor do they lie in the tried-and-false methods entrenched in our present political system—a system based upon the notion that ours is a wide-open country with inexhaustable resources and able to smugly ignore the threats beyond its borders.

Well, *I* certainly don't have the panacea.

But I suspect that one less-than-perfect answer is the legalization of various "mind drugs" (as opposed to "body drugs" like the narcotics). Marijuana is an established euphoric. The stronger psychedelics—contrary to popular myth—are introspective, non-violent drugs. The very real danger lies in their control and use by any government to "keep the people quiet," but certainly if outlets are needed to stave off cultural madness, these drugs are greatly preferable to alcohol, barbituates, "speed," and the narcotics—to which the young are turning in ever greater numbers as the Administration makes marijuana and the psychedelics harder and more expensive to obtain.

Today the newspapers are labelling the murderers of the Army doctor's family "LSD Killers," because one of them reputedly was chanting, "Acid is great," or words to that effect. This seems part and parcel of the scare campaign against LSD and the other, weaker, psychedelic drugs which has been going on for some time now. It would be useless, I suspect, to state that even if the killers *thought* they were "high" on LSD, they probably were not. Or that most of what is commonly available (on the underground market) as "acid" is really "speed" (amphetamines) or cut with "speed." The latter drug is definitely linked with violence; LSD is not.

Drugs are now working their way into junior high schools and grade schools—and largely in the affluent suburbs. What is most frightening about this drug-use is that the children using the drugs are doing so without any sense of perspective or self-control. They are willing to try nearly anything available, across the entire spectrum of drugs, and in any combination. It would appear that most of them are on binges of self-destruction, but even several recent deaths of children from overdoses of heroin seem not to faze these baby-druggies, most of whom seem convinced that they can handle anything that comes

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along (they can't, of course, lacking both knowledge and emotional stability), and also that any warning from the adult world is suspect.

This isn't surprising. The vast majority of what the "straight" world believes about drugs—all drugs—is wrong. Most teenagers, even those who haven't involved themselves in drugs, are aware of this and hold the adults who lecture them in contempt. This very contempt motivates sometimes reckless adventures into drugs, and the genuine warnings are ignored along with the bogus ones.

To me it appears that the mass exodus of today's youth into drugs is simply another facit of overpopulation paranoia: another attempt to escape (into "inner space") the exterior pressures that buffet us all. Unfortunately, it requires a certain stability and emotional maturity to take these journeys inside oneself, and childhood—when one is not completely formed and one is most vulnerable—is simply the worst possible time to be "messing with your head."

But the side-effects of all this are as important as the actual dangers implicit in drug use. The major side-effect thus far has been to polarize and widen the "generation gap." Roughly speaking, this gap defines those who are telling lies (albeit perhaps unconsciously) from those who recognize the lies.

Youth has always been idealistic—one of its virtues—but rarely have we presented our youth with such an incongruous mass of hypocritical lies. Our political system is based upon subtle moral corruptions—the very institutions on which much of our political machinery is built is obviously self-seeking and corrupt, and leads to such situations as a Republican Administration driving out its most able Federal Attorney, simply because he is a Democrat—and has proven itself unable to deal with any but the most short-term problems. (I am not attacking either democracy *or* capitalism here: I'm attacking the imperfect ways in which we practice these political and economic systems. Indeed, the thing which must most gall any idealistic person is the *lack* of real democratic procedure in our entrenched politics.) We call ourselves a "Christian Nation" (despite the Constitutional separation of church and state), but Christianity itself, as an institution, has strayed perhaps beyond redemption from its basic tenets as laid down by Christ. (And in a world befouled by overpopulation, what is one to make of the Pope's continued exhortations to breed, breed, breed?) We teach our children good and valid ethical and moral values—and then demonstrate at every level our contempt for them. If we have reconciled ourselves (perhaps cynically) to these hypocrasies, our children have not, and, for the first time, show an eagerness to reject them.

The danger here lies in the vacuum created by any wholesale rejection of the values youth has found wanting. One cannot base one's idealism on negativism. One wants new heroes, new goals, new values. And of course one of the faults of youth is its lack of perspective, by which to weigh the alternatives.

As the "older generation" shuts out the valid complaints of idealistic youth (both in Chicago-1968 and Chicago-now), it widens the gap and encourages a more violent reaction. It is difficult for me to believe that the political powers presently in control of this country are not aware of this. It is a bedrock piece of common-sense. But we have already witnessed the extent of our present Administration's blindness: one must charge Nixon and his

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Attorney General with final responsibility for every recent death of those children who perished from heroin overdoses. And they are but the smallest tip of the iceberg which threatens us all.

My wife and I are expecting our first child this August—the cover date of this issue of FANTASTIC—and it is hard to know how to feel about sponsoring another life in this contradictory world. Are we simply aiding and abetting the population explosion? (But each family could have *two* children without affecting the status quo.) How will our child regard us when he (or she) is school-age? Will we have somehow, by the process of being parents, come to alienate ourselves from our child? Will we, despite our best resolutions, find ourselves on the wrong side of that gap, unable to communicate our accumulated knowledge and wisdom to our child?

Will the world still be here in recognizable form, a dozen years from now?

God only knows. And yet we hope. And yet we go on living, trusting, perhaps foolishly, that "this too shall pass."

—Ted White

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45)

I pointed to the lame tags on the floor. "—that he was strangled?"

"In a suit of lights. What he saw, God knows, but it killed him. Perhaps now you can make a guess, Samson. Justice in a way, the tailor killed by his own cloth." He kicked the glowing shreds into the gutter and looked up at the deserted house. "I was sure she'd come back here. I hoped she'd pick one of the beachcombers but you turned up instead. Sooner or later I knew she'd want to get rid of you."

He pointed to the bedroom windows. "The suit was in there somewhere, waiting to live through that attack again. You know, I sat beside her in the car down there while she was making up her mind to use it. Samson, she turns her lovers into angels."

"Wait—didn't she recognise you?"

He shook his head. "She'd never seen me—I couldn't stand my brother, Samson. Let's say, though, there are certain ciphers in the face, resemblances one can make use of. That record was all I needed, the old theme tune of the nightclub. I found it in the bar."

For some absurd reason, despite my bruised ribs and torn skin I was still thinking of Raine, and that strange child's face she wore like a mask. She had come back to Lagoon West to make a beginning, and instead found that events repeated themselves, trapping her into this grim recapitulation of Kaiser's death.

Jason walked towards the bedroom as I stood there naked. "Where are you going?" I called out. "Everything is dead in there."

"I know. We had quite a job fitting you into that suit, Samson. They knew what was coming." He pointed to the headlamps speeding along the lake road five miles to the south. "Say goodbye to Miss Channing."

I watched the car disappear among the hills. By the abandoned nightclub the dark air drew its empty signatures across the dunes. "Say goodbye to the wind."

—J.G. Ballard

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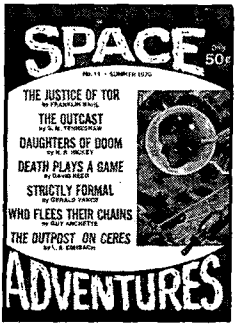

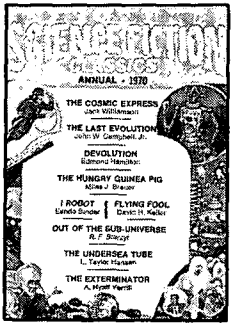

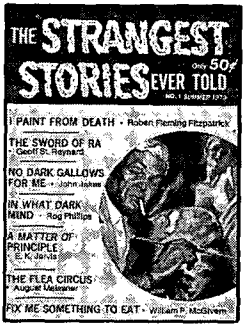

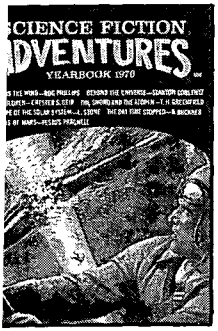

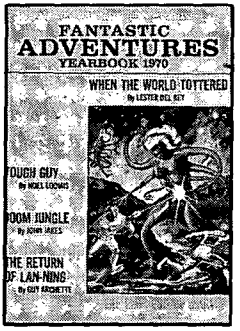

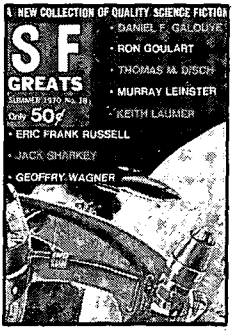

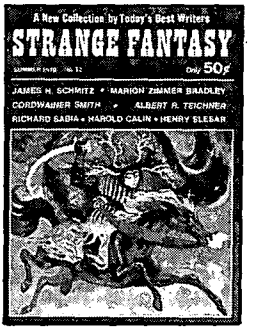

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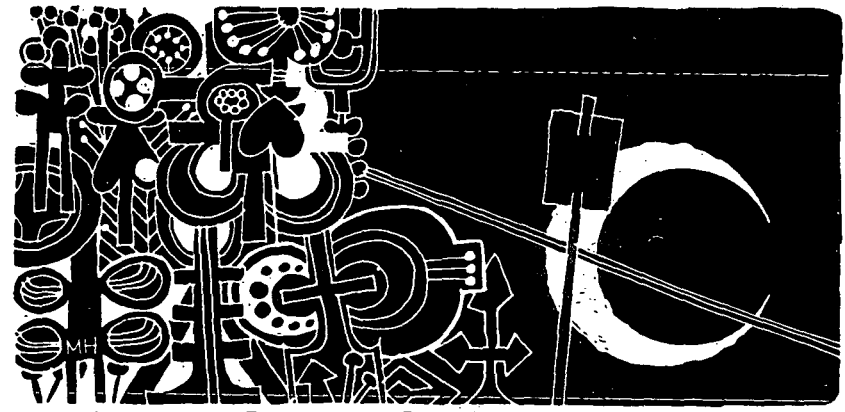

...ACCORDING TO YOU

Letters intended for publication should be addressed to According To You, *c/o P.O. Box 73, Brooklyn, N.Y., 11232.*

Our first letter is not actually a letter, but a note I found appended to the manuscript of my editorial for our last issue when it was returned from the typesetter:

Mr. White:

As typist of your work, I strongly resent the image of a half-witted idiot which you portray me to be. I daresay you will find fewer typographical errors in *my* copy as I have had to correct in *your* manuscript. As much as I "sympathize" with your HARD LIFE, don't you think you were a little rough on the "hard working" but HUMAN behind the scenes supporters to your magazine?

While it is true that you possess the genius for being able to compose your thoughts and put them down on paper, it does take a *little* brains to transcribe them for print.

Since I only deal with the initial typing, I can't speak for those who make corrections and do the makeup, but they are Human also.

For a man of your stature, your editorial sounds pretty petty and unworthy of you.

Respectfully submitted,
HG

Eight corrections were red-inked on the returned ms. of that editorial, presumably by HG, to illustrate her point. One of them "corrected" a word to one which was incorrect. The others were valid and had I reread the ms. after writing it I might have caught them myself; unfortunately, it was written at the last minute and immediately mailed out. My mistake, I confess. But in carefully rereading that editorial I fail to see where I made out HG as "a half-witted idiot," and if I somehow gave HG that impression, I apologize. Perhaps my error was in referring to a typesetting company *as "the typesetter;" a convenience of speech, but possibly*

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misleading. However, the natural order of things is that we all *make errors, and that galleys are returned to us for proofreading specifically to guard against errors in typesetting. What has been a source of increasing annoyance to me, however, is that errors and corrections I have indicated when I returned the galleys have not always been attended to. When I find them again on the page-proofs, mark them once again, and they are* still *not taken care of, I think I may be forgiven a flash of temper—most especially since the average reader assumes these are* my *errors. In our last issue I found some thirty errors which had been marked on the galleys of part one of Lee Hoffman's "Always The Black Knight" had not been corrected when I received the page-proofs. This resulted in a hold-up (against tight deadlines) while I gave the corrections over the phone to an employee of the typesetting company—a process of a half hour or more—and they were made before shipping the type out to the printer. Obviously blame cannot be attached to any one person; the typesetting company has any number of people working in each of its several departments. But in past issues corrections have been set in the wrong typefaces, paragraphs have been inserted in the wrong places, and columns or lines of type have been assembled sloppily and out of alignment—often enough for a number of readers to write us in complaint. Perhaps some of this sloppiness is due to the notion on the part of some employees of the typesetting company that no one really notices or cares. But people* do *notice, and they do care. The typesetter remains anonymous; those of us whose names appear on the magazine take the blame, and when the makeup of this magazine becomes noticably inferior to that of our competitors, it hurts us, directly. It seems to me reasonable that those people actually most involved with the typography and makeup of the magazine should shoulder their fair share of the responsibility. I would like to hope that all of the employees of the typesetting company could feel as conscientious about their work as HG obviously does. Perhaps an open discussion in these pages of exactly who does what in the production of this magazine might not only clear the air a little, but reward those who* do *put in a good job. And finally I might add that it's gratifying to find that someone over there does read the content of what is set. —TW*

Dear Ted:

This is written for inclusion in your FANTASTIC letter column, under the somewhat problematical assumption that you will have the courage and/or common courtesy to print it.

It would be a pointless exercise for me to attempt to refute your refutation of my article, "Fiawol," in *KNIGHT* magazine, since your entire argument was based on your own summary of the article, which I regard as a misrepresentation. Indeed, I would not be writing this letter at all if I did not regard your summary of the article as a misrepresentation. You have every right to your opinion, and since my article represented my detailed thoughts on the subject, there would be no point in my replying to you simply for the sake of having the last word. However, what you did do in your editorial was present a distorted summary of what I wrote and then proceed to attack the article on the basis of your own interpretation of what I said. You were arguing with yourself, not me.

Since you have chosen to make this

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article a subject of controversy in the FANTASTIC letter column, it would seem to me that you owe your readers an opportunity to read the article you are attacking. It would also seem that you owe it to me to let me present my side of the case in my own words rather than in whatever words you choose to put in my mouth.

Therefore, I am offering to let you reprint the article. However, in the event that you decide not to give your readers the opportunity to read the article and judge for themselves, I feel that there are two things you said which I cannot allow to go unanswered.

First, your bald statement that the entire article was written out of pique at Donald Wollheim is ludicrous on the face of it, since the quotations from his speech and the expository material dealing with it consumed no more than 700 words of an article that ran well over 4000 words. Moreover, as your readers will learn if you print the article, this material had nothing to do with Mr. Wollheim's opinion of *Bug Jack Barron* or any other book, but rather used his opinions on science fiction fandom as an example of the attitudes of science fiction fans towards fandom and towards the world at large. Since this was obviously what Mr. Wollheim was talking about in the two quotations I used, and since what he said there agreed substancially with what I was saying, I see no impropriety in my use of this material.

Finally, I would like to point out that the *KNIGHT* article was *not* written out of any desire to act as "gadfly" to the world of science fiction; it was written for the readers of *KNIGHT* magazine, a general audience. In part it was an attempt to disassociate science fiction as literature from the bad odor that certain aspects of science fiction fandom have given it in the minds of the general public. In this sense, while the article was not intended as a service to science fiction fandom, it was intended as a service to science fiction. A major point of the article was that these are not the same things.

But there is no point in my going any further; the article exists; it states my thoughts on the subject in full and in detail; I have offered to allow you to print it. The next step is up to you, Ted. Put up or shut up.

Norman Spinrad
Los Angeles, Calif., 90046

Inasmuch as KNIGHT's *circulation is undoubtedly several times ours, I see no point in republishing an article which I frankly regard as pernicious nonsense. If any of our readers are desperate to read it, I imagine they can find copies in the pornography shops which exist in most of our large cities. Your penultimate paragraph says it all, Norman: it reveals the extent to which you are simply in ignorance of your subject. With little or no knowledge of fandom beyond your glancing exposure to it in the last couple of years, you have seen fit to attack its "bad odor" repeatedly before mass audiences. On your appearance a couple of years ago on the "Les Crane Show" on tv, you spent a good deal of time ridiculing fans and fandom before an audience of millions, very few of whom could have had any idea about what you were discussing. It simply has not yet occurred to you that science fiction fandom is* unknown *to the general public. This notion that you must render a "service" to science fiction by publishing articles in men's sex magazines "disassociating" sf from fandom by attacking and ridiculing fandom, is either*

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quite disingenuous of you, or a piece of calculated affrontery. You are doing no service to science fiction, Norman, nor to yourself. —TW

Dear Ted:

The striking cover on the December FANTASTIC puzzled me—until I recalled that it was painted for the German translation of my own novel, *Darker Than You Think*. I like it even more, now that I understand its representation of the *Homo Lycanthropus* strain in April Bell and Will Barbee.

I've been meaning to write you that I think you're doing a wonderful job with both FANTASTIC and AMAZING. I'm still a fan at heart, and I've begun buying both magazines, for the first time in many years.

Jack Williamson
Portales, New Mexico, 88130

Thanks, Jack. Now that we're back to the use of new covers again, what are the chances we might have the opportunity to run one in illustration of a new *Jack Williamson story? —TW*

Dear Mr. White,

You were right! Yes, I certainly was surprised to see my piece published in *Fantasy Fandom* in the April issue of FANTASTIC, because, yes, I didn't really think that it would ever see print (at least not wholly intact). Amidst mixed good feelings, I can only say: "Thanks."

Let me explain:

Of course, it is very personally satisfying to be able to spout off in public on favorite topics and exasperations. Modifying this slightly are a few twinges I feel now that I see my handiwork in print—glaring at me for the first time are a bit of bad grammar here, a typographical spelling error (mine) there, and a number of points or statements I feel are ambiguous or slightly exaggerated. I may be wrong, no longer capable of judging from the position of a first-time reader. Anyhow, there are certain things in my essay that I could now (with the passage of time) delineate more concisely, precisely, and most of the areas covered could be elaborated more fully. Believe it or not, I might have gone rambling on for twice the length—at least!

In defense of my attitudes, I may have to, if there are challenging reactions to the article. And this is what I am most keenly awaiting, what I am more interested in than merely having my tirade published: reactions of any sort. An intelligent clash or elaboration of viewpoints and feelings can only be illuminating and beneficial to everyone. I applaud your new policy of allowing concerned readers to expound their thoughts in the column if they so desire.

One last thing: indeed it is "fantastic" how the appearance of your magazine has been vividly improved by the Jeff Jones cover and complementary, restrained typography. Artists of the ability and suitability of Jones can really give FANTASTIC a distinctive look.

Jeffrey Clark
48 S. Lawn Ave.
Elmsford, N.Y., 10523

Jones is back this issue as cover artist, you'll note. And J.J. Pierce's contribution to Fantasy Fandom *was indeed inspired by yours. —TW*

Dear Ted,

In this letter/article, Jeffrey Clark says "The genuine s.f. novel (in the traditional sense) is, ideally, a higher form of art than the mainstream novel . . . The s.f.

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writer must first invent his environment mentally (even if it's an extrapolation on the current one), then decide what details about it to include, for his purposes, as he writes his book. The task is obviously more difficult."

Oh? Really? How about Dos Passos? He invented a new form. How about James Joyce, who invented a new form of language? The "mainstream" (who invented that use of the term, anyway?) can be just as, if not more, inventive as any of the science fiction authors I've had the pleasure to have met and read. The merit of the work sometimes does lie in the creativity of the work, but when it does, it succeeds or fails solely on the ability of the author (assuming he used his ability). Genre is of secondary importance. Saying that an s.f. author has greater freedom is nonsense. The writer's freedom lies in his abilities.

Alex Krislov
3694 Strandhill Rd.
Shaker Hts., Ohio, 44122

Dear Mr. White:

I've just bought the April issue of FANTASTIC, the first copy I've bought in many months, and I must say I am mightily impressed with the amount of work you've put into changing and improving the quality of the magazine. The best part of the new arrangement is that FANTASTIC is now more than just a collection *of* science fiction and fantasy. Your creation and improving of the letters page(s), the editorials, the book review column, all contribute to making it a magazine *about* sf and fantasy as well. I am especially glad that you are a continuing door for Fritz Leiber to nail his Fafhrd-Gray Mouser stories onto.

I'd especially like to remark upon your editorials: John Campbell's editorials in *ANALOG*, while landmarks in that they were an editor actually saying something, and not just rambling on about "this month's issue," always seemed to me pretty well out of place, and also frequently not very well written. They were out of place because they often had no context in a science fiction magazine: it's not out of place for an editor to talk about pollution, for instance, but it irks me when he won't talk about it in the context of science fiction. And I know, from reading his stories, that John can write better than he does in most of his editorials. The point of all this is that I like your editorials much better. They are much more readable, much more rational, and much more relevant to science fiction. So keep it up.

One more thing: You referred in answering a letter in the April issue to your relative type-size. It's one of the first things I noticed when I leafed through the magazine, even before I bought it. It's impressive; it shows a friendly sort of honesty in you. Thank you for a brightly shining joy.

Douglas W. Olsen
908 Oldenborg, Pomona College
Claremont, Calif.

As a matter of fact, I suspect John Campbell writes his editorials for much the same reason I do: he has things he wants to say, and subjects he wants to discuss. Our differences lie in our backgrounds and interests, as well as our political beliefs, more than anything else. And although I strongly disagree with some of the beliefs and opinions John has expressed in recent years, I still admire him greatly as an editor and a human being: his contribution to science fiction is a lasting and important one. As for the style in which he writes, I have observed that he writes much as he speaks—and

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that such mannerisms as the circular repetition of his major points are simply characteristics of his forceful lecture style. To most effectively read one of his editorials or articles, one should visualize him speaking each word. What may seem to you "bad writing" will come alive when considered in this light. —TW

Dear Mr. White,

I once remember having read of "a gigantic balance somewhere, matching good with evil, pain with joy, heat with cold, et-cetera . . ." This is unfortunately true for the April FANTASTIC, a good issue save for Ray Russell's "The Freedom Fighter."

T'was a story, parable if you will, in *PLAYBOY* called "The Crooked Man" (the author's name escapes me) *(It was Charles Beaumont. —TW)* in which the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme with homosexuality the norm, heterosexuality perversion. In the early 50's that was considered shocking. Today it isn't even if it's pornography in lieu of sexual deviation, and won't be without considerable more insight, slightly less parroting, and a deeper exploration of that theme.

Leo Doroschenko
410 Springfield Ave.
Newark, N.J., 07103

I wonder, Leo, if you can criticise a story without holding it up for comparison (by which it invariably suffers) with another story. In your fanzine critiques—otherwise quite thoughtful and literate—you seem predisposed to this method. Since I doubt Ray intended "The Freedom Fighter" as more than a light comment on present-day trends, your comparison seems inappropriate. —TW

Dear Mr. White:

Unfortunately, I missed your October, 1969 editorial, but from the letters in the February, 1970 FANTASTIC, especially Miss Lisa Tuttle's, I hope I have a fair idea of what I missed. I am 31 years young, my hair is shoulderlength but my beard is close-cropped. I am an ex-paratrooper but I fully agree with the anti-war movement in this country. What I am writing about is your statement, "If this new generation can survive ten years of adulthood with its ideals intact and the courage to put them into effect, we shall indeed see a new and better day."

I have found to my bitter disappointment that this younger generation not only won't survive ten years but that most of the long haired "hippies" roaming around today don't even have the foggiest notion of what the movement's all about. They can really work out when it comes to a protest rally or knocking the older generation (which started the whole thing) but they sure don't tell Pop not to send them their monthly check, without which most of them would starve as they are too lazy to do anything about feeding themselves. I am divorced and occasionally I have had female guests stay at my place for a few days and man, have you ever heard of twenty-year-old girls who will use every dish in a closet and let them pile up in the sink and not clean one but wait for me to do it? This has happened too many times to be a rare event with me. There may be some who believe in a simple way of life but I haven't met any. Rather than spend my evenings with that kind of "hippie" I will be sure not to miss any more copies of AMAZING and FANTASTIC which are more "mind expanding" and informative and never never leave dirty dishes.

John Buckley

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354 East 91st St.
New York, N.Y., 10028

That's got to be one of the most unusual endorsements the magazines have yet received, John, but I thank you for it. However, I suspect you just haven't been meeting the right sort of girls. "Hippie" is a media-term; it has little application to real people, as you should realize. For every bad-luck story there's a different story in others' experiences. My wife, for instance, washed all the dishes in my sink on our first date—she was then nineteen—and I had to dissuade her from washing the refrigerator! (You can understand why I married her soon after.) Cheer up; you may find someone with whom you can share your evenings, reading AMAZING and FANTASTIC together. —TW

Dear Ted:

Concerning your comments on criticism: I agree that characterization is the most important element in a story—usually. But there can be exceptions. The movie *2001* had no real characters; the Russian production of *War and Peace* was the same way. Yet both films possess great emotional qualities which stem, not from the characters, but from the sheer power and scope of the events portrayed. There is no reason why a novel or a short story could not be written using this technique.

"The Snow Women" was my first exposure to Fafhrd. (Oh, wasted years!) What you said about characterization is beautifully illustrated by Fafhrd. Rather than being a simple-minded strong man, like Conan, he shows depth and intelligence. Fafhrd could never be described completely in a couple of paragraphs. The reader doesn't feel that he understands him completely after reading one story. So print more! *(Fritz? —TW)*

"Is Gordon Eklund a Future Roger Zelazny?" is the great question of this issue. He looks like one so far. "Dear Aunt Annie" was a tremendous stylistic achievement, and I enjoyed it immensely.

Ray Russell's "Freedom Fighter" would be funny if it wasn't so disturbing. I don't advocate censorship, but neither do I want a lot of heavy sex in *every* book I read and *every* movie I see. Yet we seem to be approaching the day when a person will have little choice, as was brought out in this story.

Mike Juergens
257 Florence St.
Hammond, Ind., 46324

I haven't seen the Russian War and Peace *and so can't comment upon it—the original novel was certainly not lacking in characterization, however. My own opinion is that* 2001 *was a two-dimensional film badly flawed by lapses in its internal logic (as well as its basic science—the pre-history of man sequence was out of date in paleoanthropological thinking five years ago) and that the addition of some real characters and their subsequent characterization would have done much for it. But it should be born in mind that* 2001 *was a* film *and as such could—and did—fall back upon its visuals where a novel or story could not. What moved most of* 2001's *audience was not its story-line, but the breathtaking views of space, the "trip" through hyper-space, etc. These are devices which the author of a written work cannot fall back upon. —TW*

Dear Mr. White:

A sentence on page 143 of your April issue I find very encouraging. Does "graphic art" to be seen in your pages

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soon mean "Vaughn Bode"? I turned a light green with pleasure when *GALAXY* announced "Sunpot" and I stand prepared to go olive on word from you.

Philip Michael Cohen
Young Israel of Cornell
106 West Avenue
Ithaca, N.Y., 14850

Originally, yes. But, as noted last issue, after we had expressed a definite interest in a regular feature by Vaughn Bode, GALAXY *(which had exiled Vaughn from its pages a year earlier in no uncertain terms) immediately decided to call Vaughn back, and offered him something on the order of two-and-a-half times as much money to sign an exclusive contract which specified that he would do no graphic-art features, illustrations, or covers (all of which he planned to do for us) for any other sf magazine. When Vaughn told us about this offer, we wished him well and urged that he accept it, since although we prize the enthusiasm among young artists like Vaughn for what we're doing with these magazines, we don't want to see him financially penalized for it. When a better deal was offered at* GALAXY, *we could not stand in its way. At the same time, we feel it is petty of* GALAXY's *editorial management to insist upon an exclusivity clause, since Vaughn is a talented man with a startling fecundity of ideas, and he could have supplied us each with non-competitive features (as indeed he wanted to do). However, we have swallowed our annoyance at* GALAXY's *impulsive attempt to make off with our bandwagon and we've widened our scope.* Fantastic Illustrated *debuts this issue with Jay Kinney; you'll be seeing Art Spiegelman, Jay Lynch, Berni Wrightson, Steve Stiles, and, I hope, most of the rest of the best talents in graphic arts here in issues to come. And eventually, we trust, Vaughn Bode too. —TW*

Dear Mr. White:

I just picked up, a few hours ago, the April issue of FANTAS TIC. Before I sit down to start reading I want to congratulate you for printing a beautiful cover by Jeff Jones. It is the finest cover to appear on FANTASTIC, that I have seen, since the Summer, 1952 issue.

Obviously, this completely nullifies my rank comment of last month pertaining to your cover art.

Good show.

Richard Connolly
19 Lagunita Ct.
Martinez, Calif., 94553

Dear Mr. White,

Lisa Tuttle is right in live-and-let-live, but maybe the world is not that simple. Or rather, the people in it are not. It is all very well to tell the older generation that they are jealous of our freedom, and are resisting change because they are encysted in their old ways; but it is their world as well. To be honest, if I were thirty years older, and a teenager came up to me and started shouting how corrupt my values were, how ignorant of life, how narrow my sex outlook, then I too would be a wee bit peeved. Although we are young, we do not have the sole virtue of wisdom. Then again, youth is a time of experiment, and the older generation seem to have a unique facility for forgetting that they were young once. Still, live and let live.

Phil Muldowney
7, The Elms, Stoke, Plymouth
Devon, England

Dear Mr. White,

Ohmigosh and Gollywhompers! A real live Jeff Jones cover!! It's beautiful!

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(Consider your feet kissed.)

I must beg to differ with Hank Stine's opinion of *The Prisoner*—the show, not the books, because I haven't read them. I agree with his opinion about British television, and I think that *The Prisoner* is a most unusual show to find on television anywhere. As an experiment in tv, it is undoubtedly a success. However, I don't think that it was any sort of 'great science fiction'; I rather thought it was a drag. In the first place, it was wholely improbable. No govern nent is going to go to the expense of such a project. They'd simply dope him up and stick him in a mental ward somewhere. But Mr. Stine says it's a parable, so that excuses it. Bull. The problem with this show—as with a lot of sf that seems to wiggle its way into *New Worlds*—is that it seems to uphold the premise that as long as it says something about our society, it doesn't have to be emotionally involving, exciting, happy, sad; it doesn't have to have real people or real events. I don't think that the way to write about indifference is to write an indifferent book: the way to do a tv show about indifference is no more to shoot an indifferent show. As long as a program is about a non-involved and uncommunicative man running around in a pasteboard world filled with cardboard people, even intentionally, and as long as nothing in particular happens to him or to them, you're going to be stuck with a boring, sterile program. If a show (or a book, story or movie) can't stand on its own as a work of fiction that can grip and move its audience, then the message it may have is powerless to make a success of it.

"The Snow Women" has got to be the best of the Lankhmar stories that I have read. It seems to have a more mythic quality than the others. (Although a preference for this is a matter of taste and I'm sure that other people will disagree with me.) I like my fantasy serious, for the most part—not humorless, but I prefer it if the author doesn't go around making an ass out of the hero. Anyway, I think Leiber did an excellent job on the background. Most authors either rely heavily on world-painting (Ursula LeGuin, for example) or seem to ignore it all together, so the reader is never quite sure what the scene should look like. It doesn't really matter in a lot of sf, but in fantasy the world is often an integral part of the theme and must be put over accurately. Leiber is one of the few authors who can get across a background without bogging down the action of what is essentially an adventure story. The only point that didn't seem to fit was the rocket bit. Not that it was illogical or anything; it just seemed gross in a story where the emphasis was on delicacy: white-on-white, woman-magic, ice-crystal spider webs rather than snowmounds blocking the road. However, I don't suppose there was any other way he could have done it, and I did like the final scene with the pine trees lighting the dawn and Fafhrd and Vlana racing down the northwind. Fantastic.

I have always liked John Brunner's work (I grew up on his old Ace doubles). "The Wager Lost by Winning" is unbelievably better than "Break the Door of Hell" was. My only complaint is that several of the encounters at the beginning had nothing to do with the rest of the story, except in setting the mood. The last part was so well put together that it could have stood on its own as a short story; maybe as it was originally envisioned it did.

I agree about Gordon Eklund. "Aunt Annie" is one of the best short stories by a non-Giant-in-the-Field (yet) that I have

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ever read. I still don't believe that it was a first story. What more can I say??

I think your new policy for *Fantasy Fandom* is really an excellent idea, and if I ever get coherent enough I'll try speaking my piece. But in the meantime, I shall say no more on the New Wave-Old Wave-Literary tangle. Jeffrey Clark has said it all. This was just the best ever issue of FANTASTIC, and if they keep on like this, each better than the last, you'll get a Hugo yet. Keep up the good work, and if you ever need an Elvish dictionary, be sure and let me know. Peace.

Paula Marmor
8339 Pierce Dr.
Buena Park, Calif., 90620

I can't agree with you about The Prisoner. *Although Number Six refrained for the most part in involvement since he was fighting against attempts to entrap and undermine his independant will, he did on many occasions betray sympathy, involvement, and indeed strong emotional attachment for others in the stories. The series was, I thought, uneven; perhaps you saw only the less successful episodes.* —Ted White

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

had not made. Besides, Jim wouldn't hear him. He was off where people don't hear and can't answer, walled in.

"Have a good trip," Lewis said.

He got his raincoat (dirty poplin, no fleece lining, hold on, wait) and went down the stairs and out into the streets. The summer was ending, the season changing. It was raining but not dark yet, and the city wind blew in great cool gusts that smelled of wet earth and forests and the night. —Ursula K. Le Guin

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 103)

pleased at the honor."

"It will be my pleasure, Mr. President."

There was a second's hesitation, and then the meeting broke up into rivulets of conversation. The President and his train streamed out into the press room, beaming.

Sorket turned back to his aides. "It has been three hundred years," he said. "Again Talathians will sleep in the homes of men. I trust you are anticipating the occasion."

He smiled, showing all his teeth, including the long needle-sharp fangs that had once terrified the peasants of the Carpathians. He turned again to gaze meaningfully at the back of the President's thick neck.

Outside, the sun went down.

—Lincoln Albert

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 127)

often have the same effect.

In many cases, the problem is not one of rejection, but simply of classification. "The Prisoner" has great merit as an allegorical fantasy about contemporary society—it simply isn't science fiction. Speculative fiction has a number of branches—science fiction proprer, rational fantasy, science fantasy, etc.—with different functions.

The position of the Second Foundation is one favoring science fiction based on the approach of Eschatological Romanticism, and opposed to the fatalistic disaster mode of the "New Wave." Borderline cases, and works that really fall into categories other than science fiction we propose should be judged by their own merits, and in relation to the other categories.

—John J. Pierce
Liaison Officer

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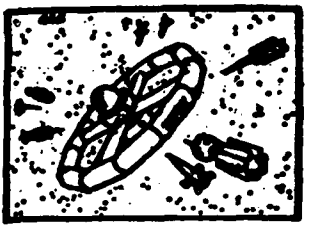

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